

Pyramid Pick

The Secret Lives of Gingerbread Men

Published by [Wicked Dead Brewing Company](#)

Written, illustrated by Annie Rush

Edited & developed by John Wick

40-page full-color PDF, \$7

full-color, spiral-bound softcover, \$15

'Twas the night before Christmas
And all through the house
Several creatures were stirring:
Cookies chased down by . . . er . . . mice

And rats. Or humans. Or the family pet, or maybe just curious children. You see, at Christmastime, Gingerbread Men have the ability to move and talk, and to have wee little adventures. And that isn't all there is to know about ***The Secret Lives of Gingerbread Men***. From John Wick's Wicked Dead Brewing Company comes this joyful bit of Christmas cheer, a roleplaying game based on what happens when the lights are out or no one's looking.

The premise is pretty simple: Gingerbread Men animate and celebrate during their brief yuletide tenure. The Mother Baker puts a lot of love into the cookies she bakes for the holidays, but even she'd never believe the Cookies live it up late at night. Adventures typically include escaping the household cat, making friends with the hungry dog, or journeying to speak with the angel atop the tree because she's rumored to have special powers.

The system uses a set of six-sided dice. Every Gingerbread Cookie gets one die just for being a Gingerbread Man (just like the dog gets a die for being a dog, the adults get one for being adults, etc.). This is called his Gingerbread Background. A Cookie also gets a Spice Background -- one of six areas in which you can excel, like Nature (speaking with animals, or going outside), or Social (talking to other Cookies). Finally you get a Zen Background, which can be most anything. You may be good at channel surfing when the people have gone to sleep, or climbing the Christmas tree.

If you want to take an action, you get one Advantage Die for everything that applies to that action. You'll always get your Gingerbread Advantage, but if you're trying to, say, throw a ball of tinfoil at the cat, you'll get a die for your Body Spice. The cat, meanwhile, gets a die for being a cat, and may get situational dice for being under the couch or sitting far away. You can also target inanimate objects (IAOs), but even they get dice for being small or heavy or whatever else the judge decides.

Both the Actor and the Target roll their dice: Every even result is a success, every odd result a failure. Whoever has the most successes (or the best numerical total in a tie) wins. If you win and have excess successes, you can mark these Cookie Crumbs on your character sheet and use them during a later action as automatic successes. If you're fighting a combat, your confectionary heroes won't actually kill anything -- you may drive off the cat, or lock it in the basement, but otherwise the activity is mostly kid-friendly. Cookies, on the other hand, suffer the loss of pieces. They can lose arms and legs (first you lose your "right" or "left," so your "right arm" would become a plain old "arm"), but once the head is gone, "the Cookie crumbles . . ."

Gingerbread Men can also carry decorations. The book provides several, with different uses. Stomping on a green

M&M makes the Cookie invisible, candy corn can be used like a knife, and pretzels let you fly.

But what really makes the lives of Gingerbread Men interesting are Secrets. Everyone has something they know and don't share, something that may give them other motivations during their escapades. You may have aspirations to become Mayor of the Gingerbread Village, or be in love (perhaps with a Sugar Cookie for that extra layer of angst); you may even be planning to betray your friends to a predator for some kind of personal gain.

You don't actually need real cookies to play, but building your character (your "miniature," though it's actually life-size) is half the fun, especially for the nippers (and there are fewer arguments about what equipment you have if it's all baked into your PC). For the cooking illiterate, mom's recipe is provided. It assumes some amount of cooking knowledge on your part (is light or dark brown sugar recommended? grease the pan or no?) and there are omissions, like the mixture's yield (one recipe gives you about 24-30 5"-tall adventurers), but it's unmistakably gingerbread. Depending on how long you cook them, they're soft and chewy or have all the spice and crunch of a ginger snap. The frosting will be store-bought if you haven't your own recipe.

The book, like the Gingerbread Men, is more decorated than illustrated. There aren't many traditional views beyond the candies that adorn the margins -- instead what they have is a series of pictures of the eponymous Cookies. Attentive readers will realize there are more than a few character ideas and storylines being hinted at in the gleeful little portraits that dot the interior.

The world is a simple one, but it's populated with colorful incidental characters and bright imagery. Legends like the wish-fulfilling angel atop the tree; the Cookiesmith, who repairs damaged treats; and the Oracle, who holds court on the dusty fridge top, are just a few of the cast members who contribute to a lively and fascinating setting. The book is geared toward family fun, though there is a sort of dark, Wonka-esque undercurrent that keeps you guessing just what kind of atmosphere the author is trying to impart. This, plus its fanciful take on the magic of the season and writing that's as smooth as boiled custard, makes ***The Secret Lives of Gingerbread Men*** an infectious delight worth several mugs of good cheer.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Turjan's Tome of Beauty and Horror (for The Dying Earth RPG)

Published by [Pelgrane Press Ltd.](#)

Written by Robin D. Laws with Ian Thomson

Cover by Ralph Horsley

Illustrated by Ralph Horsley, Charles Reid, Elliot Jeffries, & David Esbri Molinas

144-page b&w softcover; \$29.95

While Jack Vance's *Tales of Dying Earth* have had undoubted influence upon roleplaying, [The Dying Earth RPG](#) itself has mostly concentrated upon Cugel-level adventures. These are tales of swords & chicanery in which scoundrels, mountebanks, charlatans, and ne'er-do-wells attempt to charm and con their way to a better way of life. Invariably the success of such plans and pettifoggery is transitory. Events go awry, the conned see through the obfuscatory words, and the wastrel suffers his comeuppance. Such adventures are not the subject of the latest book, for they have their own sourcebook, *Cugel's Compendium of Indispensable Advantages*.

No, this book is *Turjan's Tome of Beauty and Horror*, a worthy volume for the high minded and studious, who above all have found a purpose in life, even as the Sun wanes. That purpose in the final years is the study of the arcane. Turjan-level characters seek knowledge of the last 100 spells (though there may be more), track down wonderful artifacts and devices created in aeons past, learn ancient technologies, and master the creation of vat-grown creatures. In this they are driven, determined, no less flawed, but most definitely far more capable than the amateurish efforts of Cugel and his ilk.

Such high levels are represented in character creation. Turjanic characters start out with 100 points and can increase this to 150 by making random selections during the creation process. The emphasis is upon power and its application. While good Persuade, Rebuff, and Health scores are a necessity, high scores in Magic, Attack, and Defense are paramount. A score of 15 or above is considered good in these three. Six spells are given as a good basic choice, including the infamous *Phandaal's Inside Out And Over* and *The Excellent Prismatic Spray*, but a player is free to choose or roll as he wishes. Characters are also expected to invest points in relationships, and both his manse and possessions; the later should include a magic item or two. If no points are invested in these, a player should expect to have them stolen. The supplement includes lists of both items and personalities ready for the player to buy.

Although a Turjanic character can make use of the contents of *Cugel's Compendium of Indispensable Advantages*, this supplement adds to the tweaks found there. The Turjanic tweak is of course more expensive, but provides better benefits in certain situations. The rules also allow the creation of the non-magician character, specifically the hardy warrior or loquacious diplomat, but adept thieves or enticing seductresses are also possible. They emphasize aspects where a magician is weak, the thief being able to ferret things away unnoticed and the warrior able to overbear the mightiest of physical defenses that a magician might put up. The place of the seductress highlights the uncertain place of women in this supplement, in that to be truly Vancian, they are to be mistrusted and the source of their magic should be questioned. Of course, in this politically correct age, this is an aspect of the stories that can be ignored. The rules are well explained, and four examples are given to speed the process.

According to the Vancian canon there exists just the One Hundred Known Spells as codified and handed down by Phandaal, the master magician. There are less than that given in the core book, but the GM is free to decide what spells to add to make up the remainder of the 100 from the 120 unperfected spells included. Alternatively, he can decide to ignore this limitation, allowing as many spells as he wishes, with lesser spells being looked down upon and allowing for a greater chance of spell failure. If the GM decides to respect the one hundred spell limit, those not known that is, those included in this book are difficult to find and only then during play. Those given here are in fact new to the game and setting, many making use of an online *Dying Earth* spell name generator.

One of the things not covered in this supplement is how to become an Arch-Magician. Left for a later book, the subject is broached with discussion of the specializations needed to advance to the heights of a Rhialto-type character. They include Disputation, which eases the dealings with other world entities and rival wizards; Mathematics, representing an understanding of the foundations of magic; Warding, the creation of protective wards; and Vat Master, the knowledge of how to create life itself. This specialization ties into a new and official set of rules given that replace those found in *The Excellent Prismatic Spray Vol.1, Number 2*. The creation of artificial life is a mark of prestige amongst Arch-Magicians; the process described being more complex, more detailed, and requiring the greater expenditure of Improvement Points. The rules and resulting creation proffer plenty of roleplaying opportunities.

So, too, do the extensive lists of both magic items and GMCs, or GM Characters. Again the items must be found, and included in the verbose description of each is a purported location. Many can be found in places described in previous published articles and supplements such as the *Scaum Valley Gazetteer*. Once found, players must invest Possession Points in them to ensure that they remain theirs. Further, they can now transfer items between players, sell them to a GMC, or even use them as an aid to seduction! The GMCs are a mixture of the new and those drawn from the novels, including Azvan the Astronomer, Guyal the Curator (of the Museum of Man), Thrang the Ghoul-Bear, and the Sage of Miir. These can be used as potential enemies, friends, tutors, or just plain acquaintances.

After people to see and things to find, the digest describes places to go and rumors to follow. The former lie beyond the Dying Earth, some of which may or may not be the Earth's long gone moon. Of course, such destinations are beyond the scope of the mere dabbler, and while offering adventure in themselves, would take some effort and knowledge to reach. The same cannot be said of the rumors discussed and exposed, which the players are permitted to pursue, if only to indicate to the GM the one that piques his interest. Of course, he is free to change such details as his wont, but all of the rumors are easy to fit into a game, though will need some further development.

The volume is rounded out with a selection of taglines more suited to the grimmer and stranger nature of the Turjan-level game. Although their use is optional (unlike in the Cugel-level play), they still add more flavor. This last chapter is followed several indices listing the many entries given earlier.

The actual chapter on running Turjanic games is quite short, but proves enough to make clear the differences between it and the Cugel-level games. The emphasis is upon a strong moral sense, strange places and vistas, a casual cruelty, weird magic, horror, lost knowledge, and ruined wonders. Elements like crafty swindles, exotic foodstuffs, and foppish clothing, all found in Cugel-level games, have no place here. At this level, the game is also more violent, for Turjanic characters are capable in both arcane and martial means, able to dish it out as well as take it. There is also a greater degree of co-operation between characters. They may be rivals, but not adversaries. While all this is discussed in comparison to the novels, other sources are also considered, most notably, the works of Clark Ashton Smith as well as Vance's other books and those of Robert E. Howard.

Turjan's Tome is a fine looking book, its pages graced by the delightful illustrations of Ralph Horsley. In addition it is written with wit and intelligence, and its use is aided by the extensive footnotes. Alas, there is no index, though the appendices do compensate somewhat.

The release of *Turjan's Tome* allows players to explore the world of *The Dying Earth RPG* without recourse to swords & chicanery. Indeed, this is more like traditional swords & sorcery, certainly not Tolkienesque, but given over to both fatalism and horror, shot through with a wry humor. In this way, *Turjan's Tome of Beauty and Horror* is closer to the traditional fantasy, while still retaining the flavor and elements of Vance's novels.

--Matthew Pook

Sheol

by Paul Drye

One of the most tightly held secrets of the Infinity Corps is the existence of Sheol. Discovered 18 months ago, the timeline sent a shock through Infinity's ranks because of the empty, incredibly high-tech cities it contained. Since then it's become apparent that, in defiance of known parachronic laws, it is rapidly migrating through the Quanta of its own accord. Within another year, it will reach Quantum 6 -- and its technology will become accessible to the Centrum. High priority has been attached to understanding it before it does, and keeping the Centrum in the dark as long as possible.

The Paradox

A great mystery of parachronic travel is the lack of truly advanced timelines, Caliph notwithstanding. Given the number of setbacks Homeline had in its long-term technological development, wouldn't some timelines "get lucky" and avoid these? If a point of divergence were sufficiently far in the past, a civilization could have reached the stage of industrial development many thousands of years ago, and now be so far ahead of Homeline as to be incomprehensible. A variation of the [Fermi Paradox](#) applies: "Where are they?" It defies logic that no advanced civilizations could have developed, and is only slightly less likely that none developed on a "conveyor-friendly" timeline comparable to Homeline or Centrum. It would only take one for Homeline to have been contacted while it was still developing agriculture, yet it didn't happen.

A clue to an answer -- and disturbing one it is -- is Sheol, which display the remnants of an extremely advanced parachronic civilization. Sheol is empty; before its inhabitants could establish any kind of presence in our timelines, their culture ceased to exist. How this happened is unknown. Not only is Sheol uninhabited by humans, all life is gone. There remains the possibility that some bacteria live deep within the earth's crust, and preliminary efforts are underway to explore this possibility, but so far as anyone can tell the timeline has been completely denuded of living things.

Project Croatoan

Pulled together when Sheol was discovered, Croatoan is a crash project for the investigation of the dead timeline: understand its technology, find out where it came from, discover what happened, and -- if possible -- keep it out of Centran hands.

Life on Sheol is different, and not just because of the vast tracts of mummified trees rearranged by weather into something resembling "pick up sticks of the gods" (despite the lack of bacteria causing decay, less sturdy forms of life than trees have eroded away entirely) and other obvious signs of lifelessness. First, the atmosphere is different, without plants to maintain it like on Homeline. Here, the oxygen level is half normal, and supplemental air tanks are needed for strenuous activity or people in bad health. The CO₂ concentration is also much higher, about ten times, as it's no longer scrubbed out of the air by life after being released from volcanoes and the like; on average temperatures are several degrees higher, and the ice caps have melted. The shorelines are substantially different as a result, and visitors find Sheol's air steamy and hard to breathe.

Croatoan is based out of "Rio de Janeiro" -- its closest geographic equivalent on Homeline. This is a large city, close to a million people out of perhaps 50 million on the whole timeline. The sea level is 250 feet higher than it was when the city was inhabited, and in the modern day it's very hot, but during its heyday it was probably quite comfortable for the Sheols. The researchers on site put up with the difference in order to concentrate on what is probably the best location to try and understand what happened.

Besides personnel from Paralabs, the project recruits people with a wide variety of scientific backgrounds: archaeologists, linguists, oceanographers and divers (over half the city is awash), forensic scientists, and many other

kinds of specialists. They also make a point of getting agents of the Infinity Patrol on board, as their experience with understanding other human cultures based on incomplete information comes in very handy; this is particularly true if the agent has experience with timelines where the level of technology is higher than on Homeline. There is also a fair bit of unskilled labor, as someone always needs to do the heavy lifting and Croatoan's higher-ups know they don't have a lot of time with which to play.

There are many things to be done -- too many, really -- but one focus of attention is the parachronic technology of the Sheols, which is different from Homeline's and Centrum's. The Sheols would open gates to other worlds through which matter would pass, rather than enclosing something in a conveyor or projector. The possibility of permanently open connections is tantalizing, and one Infinity is keen to unravel. Every other aspect of Sheolic technology is advanced, however, but the problem is that they are so advanced there's little common ground between it and what the Homeliners understand. Even basic technology is often based on what seem to be entirely unknown laws of physics; for example, there are no doors in "Rio" -- a matter transport network, still functioning, is used to get in and out of rooms. In places where the transport network is down, researchers have to use what must have been the emergency networks of escape hatches and tunnels, which are small and difficult to use.

The Real Story

It's entirely possible that the investigators will never discover what happened on Sheol, and the GM is encouraged to come up with his own explanation for the mystery as best fits the campaign. However, the clues and oddities listed above can be joined into the following story.

Homo sapiens sapiens developed some 40,000 years ago; this is during the Weichselian Glaciation part of the last ice age but also a multi-thousand year period of it when temperatures had temporarily rebounded to near normal. On Homeline, they had a 5,000 year period of cultural flowering, but this was cut short when the ice age clamped down again. On the original Sheolic timeline -- what Infinity calls "Sheol" was a colony of this timeline -- the original technological expansion of humans included two more technologies: agriculture and writing. As the Ice Age got worse about 35,000 years ago, the extra knowledge had let them reach a level comparable to that of the Roman Empire, and had spread into parts of the world (Southern Africa, India, and Australia) where the change in climate was not so severe. Life carried on, rather than going into a relative recession as on Homeline.

For the next 3,000 years the Sheols advanced, and some billion Sheols reached and then surpassed Homeline culture of 2015. This included the discovery of crosstime travel about 30,500 BC, when the Sheolic civilization had already reached and surpassed Caliphan levels of technology. They had built vast arcologies, starports, orbital habitats, colonized the Moon and Mars, and even "terraformed" the Earth into warmer temperatures. Even the people of the Sheolic timelines were heavily genetically engineered: larger, stronger, and subtly different from the Human norm in a variety of other ways.

By then the Sheols already had settled much of the local space within about 40 light years, so the discovery of alternate timelines led to much less exploration and settlement of other earths. Expeditions and colonies were sent out and, over the next 100 years, 20 timelines were brought into their sphere of control.

The period of Sheolic time travel ended because of their emphasis on another aspect of crosstime exploration. Looking to expand their knowledge of physics, the Sheols deliberately sought out very different timelines, where the laws of reality had crystallized out of the Big Bang in varying ways. In 30,406 BC, a colony timeline -- what Homeline now calls Sheol -- opened a gate to a reality whose laws of physics were somehow infectious. Exploding outwards at the speed of light, a bubble of the different laws destroyed all chemical interactions, closing the gate to the other universe when it destroyed the gate's circuits, but still expanding from the sphere into which it had "escaped."

During the half a year before this happened, however, all life on that timeline and all other activity depending on chemical interaction were snuffed out. Further, the bubble propagated down the crosstime network through the gates on Sheol that happened to be open at the same moment. Eight timelines in all were "killed," and somehow the shock of the propagation jarred Sheol itself loose from its quanta, moving it quickly and steadily in the direction of Quantum 5 and beyond.

The main Sheolic timeline was untouched, and their civilization has carried on in the 30,000 years since. There is no hope of ever visiting it with current crosstime technology: using Homeline terminology, it is in approximately Quantum -25,000.

Adventure Seeds

Long Time No See, Dave: One of the larger cities on Sheol is at "Davao" on the southern Philippine Island of Mindanao. Though as ocean-swamped as "Rio," investigators are sent to the location to see what (if anything) may be worth examining during Croatoan's compressed time frame.

The city is one of the very few exceptions to the endless stillness of Sheol, as it is home to one inhabitant not dependent on chemistry -- a citywide AI named Au-ila, which runs off the region's geothermal energy. It hasn't had anyone to talk to for 30,000 years. At first the city will appear dead (maintenance-bot gladiator games and the like get stale after a few millennia), but Davao will gradually come back to life as the agents come to the AI's attention. Unfortunately, in the tens of thousands of years since it last had a job to do, it lost its imperative to support humans. While it's not actively malicious towards them, it is bored, and bothering the investigators is a potential source of amusement.

The difficulty for the players lies in not only trying to avoid a literally uncaring environment, but also trying to bring Au-ila around. A cooperative survivor of the Sheolic civilization would be a gem beyond price for Croatoan; if the agents don't come to this conclusion, anyone they contact on the outside will insist that their careers are on the line if they get too violent with the AI.

In The Lion's Den: Sheol will end up within the reach of the Centrum unless its migration through the Quanta is stopped. Unfortunately, the science of doing this is in its infancy -- or at least it is on Homeline. The Centrants themselves have a much better idea of how to do it, but until now nothing had been important enough to risk agents of knowledge that Infinity will be able to develop on its own, in time. With the deadline for the Sheol's transition to Quantum 6 fast approaching, though, there's no more time. Someone is going to have to penetrate Centrum's empire and learn as much as possible about what makes timeline "flipping" possible. Then they need to get it back to Infinity.

It's The Big One: Even if it is unknown to the players, someone will eventually figure out some of the story of Sheol's destruction. That someone has decided to use the opportunity to end the troubles between Centrum and Homeline. A conspiracy of hawks within Infinity itself have secretly repaired two parachronic gates on Sheol, and are planning on using them to destroy the Centrum and as many of their controlled timelines as possible. Both are set with timers, and one is set to open a connection to Centrum. The other is set to go off five seconds later and has been programmed to cycle quickly through coordinates of potential "infectious" universes, based on what has been learned of the original apocalypse. A repeat of the original disaster, now turned into a world-destroying weapon, is imminent.

To pull it off, the conspirators are going to have to close off as many of the Infinity timelines as possible, or else risk the infection spreading down into them (or even Homeline). A series of small strikes at various projectors is to occur half an hour before the attack on Centrum, and a highly placed insider at Infinity Unlimited on Homeline is going to ensure that the network of conveyors and projectors there goes down at the same time. Unfortunately for the conspirators, the existence of one of the small strikes is discovered just two days before the operation. There are now 48 hours to the end of the world -- actually, the end of multiple worlds -- and someone has to unravel the whole plot and stop it. On the plus side, if the troubleshooters have talked around Au-ila earlier (see "Long Time No See, Dave," above) they have a powerful ally. On the negative side of the ledger, the Infinity network will be shut down preemptively an hour before the Sheol conveyors go off, just in case. If caught by that deadline, the agents will have to find their own way to safety.

Real Unions for Fantasy Games

by Keith MacKenzie

Labor unions are a savior to some and a bane to others. Wherever there are skilled workers, the possibility of a union forming is there; once it has formed, it is a force to be reckoned with. Modern unions have a great deal of power within companies requiring the skills they provide. Some unions, such as the autoworkers or electrical workers, obviously have no place in a fantasy game. Others, such as carpenters or bricklayers, could have existed and might in some campaigns, conceivably becoming a part of play beyond contacts and cover stories. A third group of unions *don't* exist in our world, but could exist in a fantasy world, and are included in some fantasy fiction and games. The most common of these are the Thieves' Guild, The Wizards' Guild, and the Adventurers guild.

The Thieves' Guild

Half labor union and half organized crime, this union is seldom recognized as existing, although everyone knows it does. Rather than a hard organization, this guild is more of a network of associations. It includes burglars, bandits, assassins, informants, fences, and lock makers.

Burglars break into homes and businesses to steal cash and goods; bandits steal cash and goods from individuals. The goods are then sold to a fence for a portion of its actual value. Documents might be sold to informants but at a very low rate. In any event, a portion of the value goes to the union.

Assassins kill for cash. Informants let assassins know who might be hiring in exchange for a finders fee. Assassins generally pay a fixed fee to the union for operating within a city.

Informants sell knowledge to burglars, bandits, and assassins. Many moonlight as beggars, not to supplement their income but to have a reason to be almost anywhere. Some have clerk jobs for important individuals and companies within the city. Informants do not usually pay to be in the union -- their value is in their knowledge -- but anything the union does for them is based on quantity and validity of information provided.

Fences buy stolen goods below the market value, reselling what cannot be readily identified or melting metal jewelry and resetting stones for more identifiable items. Most fences are also storekeepers. A fence with no use for what he gains will transact with another fence rather than sending the thief to him. Because the union dictates the pricing of most goods with respect to fences, there is no shopping around; most thieves know only one fence in any given city, but almost all the fences know each other. Like informants, fences do not pay to be in the union, but must deal with union thieves if they have the cash available. Fences are also the primary source for any items of questionable legality, such as lock picks.

Lock makers sell insurance. For an extra fee, a union lock maker might guarantee his lock impervious to burglary for five years. The lock maker then gives a portion of the insurance to the guild and guild burglars agree not to pick locks with a given mark. Inversely, a guild lock maker might provide tips on breaking certain locks of customers who didn't want the insurance.

Smugglers, drug pushers, prostitutes, gamblers, and other illegal or immoral trades might be included in the guild, work alongside the guild, employ the guild, or be completely separate organizations.

Managers are usually guild leaders of other trades guilds or owners of warehouses and similar labor heavy business, so that it is not surprising that they have frequent meetings, income without cause, and an interest in city affairs. The managers are responsible for bribing city officials and insuring the honesty within the guild.

Because the guild is not a public entity, guild members and managers do not have any special titles, although there may be certain terms of respect used, such as guildier or Godfather. Guild members will be recognized by insignias

such as a rings, pins, tattoos, or scars, as well as with gestures such as secret handshakes and seemingly innocuous phrases. Law enforcement will usually try to get inside the guild by using one of these, but members know to look for all three.

Apprenticeship in the Thieves' Guild is dependent upon the trade the apprentice is most likely to enter. Burglars usually start out working for a lock maker until the basics are known, then continue with a burglar. Many assassins start out as informants to learn the importance and the methods of observation. Fences are usually corrupted merchants and bandits are unemployed fighters and as such have no apprenticeship through the guild.

The Thieves' Guild in Play

If one or more players opt to be a member of the Thieves' Guild, he should remember that a portion of any loot must be given to the guild. If a thief is a member of multiple guilds, the dues are paid to each guild. This does not generally include pay, but only comes from items removed from the dead or stolen. In any city where he is a member, the thief will know where to sell any objects recovered from the adventure and know about how much to expect for them. Additionally, a union thief can find, in a short time, a guild member from any of the occupations while in city where he is a guild member. A thief operating in a city where he is not a guild member will be approached by a manager and encouraged to join. If the thief refuses, assassins and/or bandits may visit him, his family or his friends; informants might start informing the city watch; and fences will not do business and may also inform the watch. He may also be framed for a crime.

A guild thief might be employed to steal a specific item from a known target or put one back, to put something where it never should have been, or just break into a place to create a diversion.

The Wizards' Guild

The Wizards' Guild is more of a professional organization than a labor union. Depending upon the rarity of wizards in a given world, this guild is usually a national entity or occasionally global. As an exception, unions might be local if wizarding colleges are in most major cities.

The guild is usually organized by one or two wizards who work for free or a low rate of pay. There is little organizing to do, except following up on complaints about members and finding wizards to fill positions with nobles and royals. The largest effect of the wizards' guild is pricing. Each spell has a fixed cost, and each wizard capable of casting the spell will charge that cost. This applies to single castings and item enchantments. A wizard may accept or reject a job, refer or refuse to refer a customer to another wizard, or even turn a particularly dislikable customer into a toad with no union repercussions. However, if the customer is a guild wizard, the job will almost always be taken for the fixed rate and normally given a higher priority than other jobs. Additionally, guild wizards generally have no reason not to teach another wizard a given spell, although time taken should be compensated. Wizards from neighboring guilds are often treated with respect and generosity, but if there are two guilds in an area, they will often be bitter toward one another if not openly hostile. Because of the public and prestigious nature of wizard's guilds, the members are allowed and encouraged to use titles, such as wizard and sorcerer. Non-guild wizards in a union city are generally discouraged by the union from using these titles, although magic-user and charlatan are usually considered acceptable.

The Wizard's Guild in Play

If no players are guild wizards, the guild will mostly serve as a source for one-shot spells, scrolls, potions, and other enchanted items as well as a place to sell mystic tomes of forgotten lore. Additionally, wizards may be hired for scale (comfortable lifestyle) with bonuses for exceptional risk. Wizards working for scale are not entitled to shares of treasure. The wizard's guild also occasionally hires non-wizards for certain tasks that should not be connected with their organization.

If some players are guild wizards, the guild is the ultimate in resource centers. Almost every spell is available to be learned, and enchantments are finished faster. If the guild hires the PC party for a job, however, the guild wizards will

be expected to work for free; in this case, a share of treasure would still be expected, presuming the wizard contributed to the job and didn't just supervise. Third parties might contract the guild for a job, and a player PC may be allowed or even encouraged to employ his associates.

If all the players are members of the guild -- for instance students or teachers at a wizarding school -- projects could be assigned to the group for any number of reasons: the group might have mastery in a single field or a diversity of spells, they might be the best group currently available, or (if the guild would like the mission to fail) they might be the "right" group for the job. Missions to recover artifacts or rare materials would not be uncommon for guild wizards, nor would ventures to hostile environments such as underwater or magna streams.

The Adventurers' Guild

These guilds are located primarily in major cities, and consist of a large area with training, research, medical, and recreational facilities. For a nominal yearly fee, anyone may join, as long as the individual has been on an adventure or is seeking to go on one. The dues are for building maintenance, improvements, and pay for the staff of the legal center and library. Most guilds have the following features:

Bank: Allows deposits and withdrawals and will issue letters of credit to adventurers intending to travel great distances. Like modern banks, the money saved is reinvested for profit to the guild and interest is not usually paid, but it is a better choice than carrying 12,563 copper pieces in the backpack.

Legal Center: A lawyer and several clerks will help guilders to buy and sell land, write and inspect contracts, draw up and execute wills and trusts, and help to resolve any other legal issues heroes might have.

Healer: A skilled healer is on call any time of day or night for those needing them urgently. The skills are applied free of charge, but supplies might have a cost associated with them, especially rare herbs. Depending upon the nature of healing magic, re-growth or reattachment of limbs or resurrection might be available.

Training Center: A large, well-staffed training center provides education in almost any field an adventurer might require. A majority of instructors are veteran adventurers themselves, so heroes are sure to get practical knowledge, not just "book smarts."

Library: A collection of maps, scrolls, and books is at guild members' disposal as well as a few research specialists.

Housing: The guild provides, again for a fee, housing for adventurers who haven't yet purchased a house, or feel that a house is not the best choice because of their lifestyle. Because of space, most rooms are double or quad occupancy, but might have only a single adventurer if tenancy is low.

Offices: Union Companies may rent office space from the guild, just off the entry hall; this would be where clients meet with company managers to negotiate a job. It is considered misconduct to put a client on a waiting list. If a company cannot take a job immediately (or when the client specifies) the manager should refer them to a different company.

Bulletin Board: This is an area where adventurers and clients can put ads to buy or sell equipment or look for freelance work.

Club Room: This member's only tavern is a place to relax and swap tales with veterans or boast of ones own adventures. Honesty is encouraged, but so is embellishment. Additionally, because of the combined experience, odd, unique or rare items might be identified by someone here.

The Adventurers' Guild in Play

New PCs, both at campaign start or later introductions, are directed to a company and hired, or they start their own and arrange to lease office space. In any event, and new clients come in, some will find their way to the PC company.

Because of the nature of this guild, it is the most welcoming to PC groups. All matter of adventure leads can be brought in through this guild where the thieves and wizards guilds might not be appropriate. Any mission could come into this guild, unless the thieves, wizards or militia are more appropriate. Adventurers are too costly for a war, and may lack the expertise for missions oriented completely towards specialists.

Interrelations Between Guilds

The wizards' guild tends to feel superior to the other guilds because of the amount of education and knowledge contained within its structure. They strongly dislike the fact that adventurers seem to gain reputation faster than wizards, but generally attribute this to the ignorance of the masses. They will, as needed, employ members of the other guilds, but do not like to as it discredits their superiority. Given the choice, the wizards will hire adventurers before thieves.

Thieves look down on the adventurers as idiots. The risk-to-profit ratio for adventuring is much higher than most are willing to accept. Crime within the city walls is generally less dangerous and therefore more appealing. They do respect the wizards for their devotion to the cause, but also resent their high and mighty attitude. Because of the nature of business, thieves are more likely to hire wizards than adventurers. It is more likely that an enchantment or counter spell will be of more use to a thief than any artifact found in a dungeon.

Adventurers, being a more diverse group than the other two guilds, are more accepting of both. They enjoy the thrill seeker reputation given to them by the thieves and the resentment of the wizards, but will hire either guild as a given job requires. Because a lock or door can be broken, thieves are seldom hired by adventurers, although a few have been lured away from the life of crime for permanent positions. Wizards, on the other hand, often have methods that cannot be imitated, so are more frequently hired, but usually just for in-house jobs, seldom for field work.

Ixion

for *Hero System*

by Steve Long

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
8	STR	-2	11-	Lift 75 kg; 1½d6 HTH damage [1]
10	DEX	0	11-	OCV: 3/DCV: 3
10	CON	0	11-	
8	BODY	-4	11-	
14	INT	4	12-	PER Roll 12-
10	EGO	0	11-	ECV: 3
13	PRE	3	12-	PRE Attack: 2½d6
10	COM	0	11-	
3	PD	1	Total: 3 PD (0 rPD)	
2	ED	0	Total: 2 ED (0 rED)	
3	SPD	10	Phases: 4, 8, 12	
4	REC	0		
20	END	0		
17	STUN	0	Total Characteristics Cost: 12	

Movement: Running: 6"/12"

Cost Perks

13	Computer (see separate character sheet)
30	Computer Links (30 points' worth of the GM's choice)
5	Money: Well Off
4	Reputation: extremely skilled and daring hacker (among the Hacker World) 14-, +4/+4d6

Skills

11	Computer Programming 16-
7	Cryptography 14-
3	Electronics 12-
3	KS: American Politics 12-
3	KS: Computer Games 12-
5	KS: The Hacker World 14-
3	KS: Offshore Banking 12-
5	PS: Hacker 14-
3	PS: Computer Game Player 12-
5	PS: Computer Programmer 14-
5	SS: Computer Science 14-
3	SS: Mathematics 12-
5	Security Systems 14-; Only Versus Computer Security Systems (-1/2)
1	Sleight Of Hand 8-
1	Streetwise 8-

Resource Points

28	Equipment Points: 200
0	Vehicle/Base Points: 10
0	Follower/Contact Points: 5
0	Miscellaneous Points: 0

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 143

Total Cost: 155

100+ Disadvantages

- 25 Hunted: FBI Cyber Division 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Honorable; Always Keeps His Word (Common, Strong)
- 15 Social Limitation: Secret Identity (Rick Carver) (Frequently, Major)

Total Disadvantage Points: 155

Background/History: Ixion -- or Rick Carver, to give the name you'd find on his driver's license -- is something of a legend in cyberspace. He's best known to the online community as the owner and operator of wheeloffire.net, a popular website that comments on cultural and political issues with a wicked wit and caustic, clever insight from a vaguely-left-of-center perspective. Visited by thousands of people every day, wheeloffire.net has made Ixion something of household name among certain segments of the online community.

But other segments -- smaller, darker ones -- know and respect Ixion for something else altogether. Unbeknownst to the vast majority of his fans, and so far unprovable by his nemeses in the Cyber Division at the FBI, Ixion is one of the most talented and experienced hackers in the business. With a skill and ease that would frighten many a computer security specialist, Ixion slips in and out of computer systems, seeing things people don't want him to see . . . and often asking them to pay him money to keep him from showing those things to others.

Personality/Motivation: A fascination with technology and what it can do first drew Ixion into hacking, but he stayed with it for the thrill. He loves solving the puzzle of someone's security programming and getting into places where he's not supposed to be. The fact that he's made himself wealthy by selling (or not selling, as the case may be) the information he gains is secondary. He doesn't really care about the money; what matters to him is proving that nothing -- nothing -- can be kept secret from him if he wants to learn it.

Quote: None; Ixion rarely encounters people in person so he could talk to them. If he's feeling impish, he might sign his "work" with a tiny logo of a man tied to a burning wheel (a symbol that's very different from his website's logo).

Powers/Tactics: Ixion's not a combatant -- if confronted with physical force, he flees if he can, but surrenders if he has to. The PCs are more likely to deal with him as a criminal they have to track down and stop. His typical m.o. is to penetrate a computer system, find secret or sensitive data in that system, then blackmail the system's owner into paying him not to reveal the information (either to the victim's competitors, or to the world at large). But for all that, he's not without honor -- as his victims have learned, once they wire the money to whichever of his many offshore accounts he specifies, he always makes good on his promise to (a) return the data, and (b) tell them the way he got to it. (Well, at least one of the ways; he doesn't think it's part of the bargain for him to reveal every security flaw he discovers in a system.)

Ixion has a powerful reputation in the online community, but taking advantage of it is tough. It's easy to claim to be someone online, after all. More than once he's had to trash someone's system -- at least temporarily -- to convince them he's the real Ixion. Once they believe he is who he says, most hackers know that it's to their benefit to cooperate with him. After all, he sometimes hands out juicy tidbits of information or hacking tips to people who've done as he asked.

Campaign Use: Ixion could enter the campaign in many ways. The simplest is for him to hire out as a hacker for some villain or adversary the PCs are going up against. A more elaborate way would be for him to stumble into a PC's secret computer records and try to blackmail money out of the PC in his usual fashion. This time he may have bitten off more than he can chew

Ixion isn't intended to be a combatant, so you probably don't need to make him more powerful. You could upgrade his computer skills a bit if you wanted, or perhaps give him really low-level cyberkinetic abilities of some sort (provided you keep them consistent with the feel and nature of your Dark Champions campaign, of course). To weaken him, just

reduce his computer-related Skill Rolls until he's at a more appropriate level for your campaign.

Ixion generally doesn't Hunt people; it's not worth the time. Only if he got really mad at a PC (maybe one who exposed him to the cops and got him arrested) would he start a vendetta against that person. In that case, the PC had better disconnect all his computers from the net, because if he doesn't, Ixion will begin a full-scale assault on them -- and anything he finds, he'll use against the PC.

Ixion has no criminal record. The FBI suspects him of all sorts of hacking-related crimes, but as yet has been unable to prove anything against Rick Carver.

Appearance: Rick Carver is a thin guy in his late twenties or early thirties. He's 5'9" tall with sandy blonde hair, a matching soul patch, and usually a touch of five o'clock shadow. He's sort of lankily built, but spending too much time in front of the computer and eating too much junk food has got him started on a pot belly. He usually wears jeans and a t-shirt.

Ixion Plot Seeds

Here are three plot seeds involving Ixion:

Ixion starts dating a neurologist at Vreeland Memorial Hospital who is, shall we say, not quite as ethical as the AMA might like. With her help, he designs a computer program that he can download onto someone's computer as a sort of virus. The program causes the computer monitor to flash in a hypnotic pattern, allowing Ixion to take control of the person's mind for a short period of time. At most he can achieve an EGO +20 Mind Control effect . . . but that's enough to make most people empty out their bank accounts. The PCs hear about a rash of odd behavior; they have to find the cause and stop Ixion's depredations.

One of the PCs gets an e-mail from Ixion. He claims his life's in danger and that he needs help. Is the PC willing to help the notorious hacker . . . and if so, is the whole thing just some elaborate scam, or is Ixion really in trouble?

A strange file somehow finds its way onto a PC's hard drive. Unable to open it, much less read it, he has to turn to the infamous Ixion for help -- but how can he arrange matters so he can trust Ixion?

Ixion's Laptop

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
19	INT	9	13-	PER Roll 13-
10	DEX	0	11-	OCV: 3/DCV: 3
3	SPD	10		Phases: 4, 8, 12

Total Characteristics Cost: 19

Cost	Powers	END
7	TEMPEST Equipment: Detect Computer Radio Emissions 14- (Radio Group), Range; Blocked By Power Defense (-1/2)	
12	Communications: HRRP (Radio Group)	0
5	Shielding: Power Defense (5 points)	0
Skills		
9	Computer Programming 16-	
9	Cryptography 16-	
3	Electronics 13-	
10	AK: Earth 20-	
3	KS: Archived Recent News 13-	
3	KS: Current News 13-	
3	Voice Recognition Software: Language: English	

6 Security Systems 16-; Only Versus Computer Security Systems (-1/2)
3 Systems Operation 13-
20 More Skills, as appropriate

Talents

3 Chronometer: Absolute Time Sense
5 Memory/Recorders: Eidetic Memory
3 Calculator: Lightning Calculator
Programs
1 Diagnose Malfunctions
1 Scan and Enter Data
1 Scramble/Unscramble Transmissions/Receptions
1 Search Reference Material For Information On A Topic
1 Send/Receive Data
3 Three Other Programs, as appropriate

Total Abilities Cost: 112

Total Computer Cost: 131

Value Disadvantages

None

Total Disadvantage Points: 0

Total Cost: $131/5 = 26$

Final Cost (OAF): 13

Description: Ixion's favorite computer is a laptop he built and programmed himself. In addition to standard computing chores, it's equipped with programs that allow it to emulate TEMPEST gear and "read" what's on the screens of other computers, to operate various types of electronic systems, and to help Ixion penetrate computer security programs.

Pyramid Interview: Mark C. MacKinnon

by Steven Marsh

Founded in 1997, [Guardians of Order](#) has had a long and distinguished history, publishing RPGs ranging from anime (*Big Eyes, Small Mouth*, *Slayers d20*) to supers (*The Authority*, *Silver Age Sentinels*) to cyberpunk (*Ex Machina*).

But Guardians of Order's president Mark C. MacKinnon posted a recent [New Year's Message](#) that describes how 2004 was a difficult year. Amid circling speculation and pre-written eulogies, Mark agreed to sit down with *Pyramid* and set the record straight.

* * *

Pyramid: Mark, your New Year's Message is thorough but pretty long. For those just skimming through fan speculations and statements on some message boards, you'd think the end was nigh. So, in 50 words or less: What's going on with Guardians of Order?

Mark C. MacKinnon: We are adjusting our business plan to match the realities of running a Canadian export business during a time with a weak US dollar. This includes downsizing the company and moving to a greater freelance model, and asking our fans for help converting inventory to cash. 46 words.

Impressive! For our readers who may not be familiar with the nuances of the gaming business, what are the advantages or savings of moving to a freelance model? Does it end up saving money, shifting around when money is owed, something else . . .?

First, it allows us to incur expenses in U.S. funds, rather than in Canadian funds as employee salaries. This means we don't lose money to conversion. Also, it means we only incur expenses directly relating to projects -- writing, layout, art, line development, etc. -- rather than general overhead, which allows us to track our profitability project-by-project more easily. Finally, many freelance contracts (including most of ours) involve a portion of the final payment after publication, which obviously helps cash flow. Salaried employees are a preferred business model -- one that we have used since 1999 -- but it is simply not feasible for a small Canadian publisher with a weak US dollar.

It's not very often that the gaming industry gives much thought to U.S. economic conditions or fiscal policy; can you give a brief overview or example as to how the weak dollar has hurt Guardians of Order?

Most of our fixed costs (salaries, rent, taxes, and some printing) are in Canadian dollars (CAN), but our income in U.S. dollars. Thus, we need to convert much of our net revenues to local Canadian currency to "pay the bills." We used to get about \$1.60 Canadian in 2002 for every U.S. dollar, but now we get about \$1.15-\$1.20. This means that for every \$100,000 USD of net revenues, we lose about 30% compared to 2002 -- our about \$35,000.

Note that this isn't a loss in sales revenue -- sales have gone up for our company for three years now -- but a loss of net CAN revenue.

How long has Guardians of Order been wrestling with this problem? The dollar has been weak for a while, and you comment that there's no end in sight; were you hoping it would turn around, or did you have other plans which would have compensated for this?

It started in early 2003, and has become progressively more difficult since then. We had hoped it would turn around in 2004, since most economists we have been following thought that it would stop or stabilize at about \$0.74 (the inverse of \$1.35) -- not as good as we hope, but far better than \$0.85. This type of sharp U.S. dollar decline is unprecedented in such a short time though, so many predictions were wrong. Some economists are now calling for a \$0.90 dollar in 2005 -- a scary thought indeed.

As for our plans, we have been doing all we can to increase gross U.S. revenues -- plans that have largely been working decently, but not perfectly. This includes producing more larger, more expensive books, and trying to move them through alternate channels (such as the book trade). Still, unless we increase sales by that 30% we are losing in exchange, our profitability is not certain.

Does the downsizing affect any of Guardians of Order's other plans or efforts, such as conventions? (You all had a pretty impressive presence at GenCon last year . . .)

Somewhat, yes, but we have always been lucky enough to have the support of friends and freelancers to help us at conventions. Our presence will change, but our products will still be available.

There have been some charges on the boards that Guardians of Order's problems have stemmed at least partly from segmenting their fan base, with a plethora of choices and variations on two systems (primarily *Tri-Stat* and the *d20 System*). Do you agree?

Not at all. Rather, we have been increasing our fan base by producing *d20 System* products, and alternative *Tri-Stat* products. As everyone knows, core books generate the most income, and it is vital for us to continue producing core books. Clearly, we can't just have one game line. Yes, there has been some segmentation, but I think the cross pollination between our lines have more than made up for any losses.

It's also necessary to remember the realities of distribution of costs. By releasing two *Silver Age Sentinels* core books (one for *Tri-Stat* and one for *d20 System*), we amortized our creative costs over two books rather than one. It's both cost effective and a great way to expose our products to new customers.

In the gaming world, all tiers (distributors, retailers, and fans) seem quick to pounce on any rumors of a company's demise. What effect does this kind of speculation have, and do you think this is unique to the gaming industry?

Watching the stock market, I don't think it's unique . . . but it can be exceptionally frustrating. The internet is one of the greatest benefits to the gaming industry, but it is also the industry's worst enemy. Rumors abound on the internet ("[Did you hear that John Wick died recently?](#)"), and often things get blown way out of proportion.

In your Message, you comment that those in the gaming industry universally agree on the decline of traditional roleplaying-game sales. You go on to discuss that, despite being an RPG-only company, Guardians of Order saw its gross revenue increase for the third year in 2004. How do you feel about the current state of the RPG market? Is the industry-wide downturn a temporary setback or signs of worse things to come?

RPGs are crashing miserably right now, and no one knows exactly why. Some speculate the release of *Dungeons & Dragons v3.5*, while others just say it's the U.S. economy. I have no idea, but I know how much our unit sales have fallen and it's not healthy. I've heard that board games are doing quite well, though, so I don't think it's universally all games.

I don't have the breadth of knowledge to comment on the scope, but in my eyes, it's going to keep getting worse and worse. Maybe *Dungeons & Dragons 4th edition* (ooh, look -- an internet rumor!) will turn things around . . . or put the final knife in the corpse.

Let me state one thing though, so my comments aren't misinterpreted: There isn't an "RPG industry." There's Wizards of the Coast, and then there's everyone else. Wizards of the Coast *is* the industry. While many other companies (many of them I admire very much) produce great products, it pales to the juggernaut that is *Dungeons & Dragons*. When I say that the RPG industry is in trouble, what I really mean is "many small publishers are in trouble, the few mid-tier publishers are smart enough to adapt, and I have no clue regarding the Wizards-of-the-Coast situation." That's too long to write, though, so I paraphrase.

So what are the plans for turning things around? Is there a killer product or two in the pipeline that your hopes are resting on, do you plan on continuing on as you have been, or something else?

The killer product is ***A Game of Thrones RPG*** (all three editions!), and ***BESM Third Edition*** (primarily designed by David L. Pulver). Many other products, such as ***Tekumel*** and ***Dreaming Cities***, should do well, but ***A Game of Thrones*** will do wonders for us. If that product wasn't on the horizon, it would be a very bleak time for Guardians of Order.

We have 20+ products planned for 2005, and already about a half-dozen for 2006. We are unsure exactly what the future will hold for Guardians of Order, but we simply have too many products to bring to market -- we can't just go away. We'll certainly be smaller and more focused, but we'll still be here.

It seems you're at a point where other publishers might throw in the towel, licensing or selling their properties to other companies or just dropping out of sight. (In fact, Guardians of Order has been on the other side of that equation, distributing the *Nobilis* line.) Since it sounds like it's going to be a struggle, what's your motivation for continuing on?

There are many reasons to continue. Perhaps primarily, I like what I do. Well, most of the time at least (I hate spending many hours each week on micromangement of finances for an undercapitalized company!). There are several projects I have committed to publishing (foremost ***A Game of Thrones RPG*** and ***BESM Third Edition***), and would be sad indeed if I couldn't bring them to market. Also, there are a number of people -- including friends and freelancers -- who have contributed their time and money to Guardians of Order, and they need to be paid. Continuing is the way to ensure they do.

Of course, it's not exactly a seller's market either. Sure, if someone offered me a cool million for the company, I'd be more than happy to step aside . . . but that isn't very likely. But here's the chance for one lucky *Pyramid* reader to prove me wrong!

Speaking of *Nobilis* (and its many vocal fans who read *Pyramid*), what's the status of that line?

Since we took over distribution of ***Nobilis***, it was always with the understanding that the owner of the ***Nobilis*** line would determine what ***Nobilis*** products would be released, and when. We have not since been presented with any anticipated release dates for future ***Nobilis*** supplements, so I am unsure when they will be produced.

It's no doubt been a topsy-turvy year for Guardians of Order, and the weak dollar has obviously put a pall over some well-received and great-looking books. What do you think is your biggest accomplishment of 2004, and what's the biggest disappointment?

Biggest accomplishment: ***Ex Machina***, without a doubt. It's an awesome product, and has garnered nothing but rave reviews from the community. Also, ***The Authority*** is one of the most gorgeous RPG books ever produced, thanks largely to Hitch's amazing artwork and our Art Director's design talents.

The biggest disappointment is that we couldn't get ***A Game of Thrones RPG*** out this year as I had hoped. There were numerous reasons for the delay, but in the end the final product will be one of the best RPGs ever released. So my disappointment will turn to joy come the spring.

Finally, what can fans of Guardians of Order do to help the company through this difficult time?

Buy, buy, buy! We're not asking for donations -- there are those who need a hand up far more than we do -- but a chance to sell you those books you've always wanted to try, but never got around to purchasing. Whether it's ordering from [our webstore](#) for those rare items, buying our PDFs from [DriveThruRPG.com](#), or asking your favorite local (or internet) retailer for our products, it will help us tremendously. Every sale helps, and we are grateful for the support and response we have had from the gaming community so far. Please -- keep it up!

Are Predictions Called Postdictions After the Fact?

Shortly after ushering in the new year amid fire crackers and alcohol some 360-odd days ago, I started a new attempt at an annual tradition designed to help fulfill my weekly wordage quota. Namely, I put on my prognostication hat (which looks suspiciously like a stolen Hilton towel wrapped around my head and held in place with a fork) and predicted what the far-flung future of 2004 would hold for our humble industry.

It's time, then, to pull up last year's results and see how we did. (You'll note that the column has slipped into the "royal we" here. If one had been uncannily accurate in all one's predictions, one might be more assertive about one's first-person-ness.)

Without further adieu, then, here's what I thought was going to happen [last year](#):

I predicted that print-on-demand would come into its own in 2004. It didn't happen. By a long shot, it didn't happen.

Oh, sure, some game companies are releasing their products via print-on-demand. But for the most part the limitations have been two-fold – one solvable and one perhaps not.

First, the quality still hasn't been fully inspiring. In a best-case scenario, a great-looking POD book will look like an average-quality book printed via traditional means. To be honest, I'm still uncertain why this happens. While it might be the fault of the process, it's possible this might be because companies drawn to the POD model don't have the resources to devote to books that look as good as more "traditional" publishing houses. So while it's still possible for the technical aspects of POD to be refined, even if we end up with *Star Trek*-esque replicators capable of making exact duplicates, it still won't look good if the original resembles something assembled on an old mimeograph machine.

However, the second, larger problem is more insurmountable: Cost. At present, a POD book costs on order of two to three times as much as a traditional printing means (assuming a print run of at least two thousand or so). In other words (and using grossly simplified numbers), if you print books for \$5.00 apiece, a publishing company can sell them to a distributor for \$10.00, who can then turn around and sell them to retailers for \$20.00, who can then turn around and sell them for \$39.95 to consumers. But if that same book costs, say, \$12.00 apiece, then you're either left with a book retailing for almost \$100, or someone is taking an unreasonable hit . . . almost certainly the publisher, in this case. (As a hint, publishers would be well-advised against selling the book that cost them \$12.00 to distributors for \$10.00.) And, coupled with the uncertain quality of POD products, you can end up with a book which costs more than double a comparable book, *and* seem to be of lesser quality.

So, POD has a long way to go. I think it might get there some day, but I'd be amazed (yet pleasantly surprised) if it happened this year.

Reality: 1

Steven: 0

I also predicted some company would do something creative and innovative with print on demand. In fact, they did: They avoided it. However, I don't think I can count this one as a victory.

Reality: 2

Steven: 0

I predicted one of the Moderately Big Companies would have "a major restructuring, involving a departure from the traditional games they had been creating, or getting out of that biz altogether."

This one is tougher to call. On the one hand, it seems Decipher's limbo status with its *Star Trek* and *Lord of the Rings* RPGs might be a win; Decipher's [RPG](#) section hasn't been updated since May, for example. But, as best I can tell, nothing official has been forthcoming from them, so I feel reluctant counting that.

This week has also seen [Guardians of Order](#) announcing downsizing and company restructuring, although they're going to be sticking it out. (Check out our interview this week with Mark C. MacKinnon, as he sets the record straight with what's going on with them.) But, again, it doesn't really fulfill the spirit of my prediction.

Nevertheless, between the two of 'em (Guardians of Order's "major restructuring" and Decipher's "departure from the games they'd been creating/getting out of the RPG biz"), I'm going to count it as a score. Don't like it? Take it up with the ref.

Reality: 2

Steven: 1

I predicted the gulf between the efforts of the Big Guys and smaller publishers getting wider. I confess that I don't have as much evidence to point to here; ever since I moved from Tallahassee to outside Philadelphia, I don't have biweekly access to my Former Friendly Local Game Shop, so I haven't seen a lot of what's going on. (Our closest shop seems to focus on the more "proven" lines.)

Nevertheless, I'm going to count this one as a win. Companies like Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order have been producing beautiful-looking full-cover hardcovers at a moderate (if not impulse purchase), and others such as White Wolf and AEG have been releasing absolutely huge products (*World's Largest Dungeon* or the fat *Vampire* core book) at reasonable prices (okay; \$100 isn't cheap, but White Wolf offering its snazzy *World of Darkness* rulebook for less than \$20 is a great deal). Regardless, the bigger companies *are* continuing to distinguish themselves by producing products that other, smaller companies just can't do.

So I'm going to count that one as a score, too.

Reality: 2

Steven: 2

Downloads 'R' Us. I predicted the rise of electronic publishing in the gaming world.

Funny story time: When I met Scott Haring at Dreamation last year, he was cautiously optimistic that Steve Jackson Games' e23 electronic product outlet would be up and running by February. (I learned this after I wrote my column, so it's not like I was using my massive insider knowledge to make the prediction.)

Alas, 11 months later, e23 still hasn't been released to the public.

In the interim, however, fate decided not to make a liar out of me by ensuring that DriveThruRPG.com opened back in June. An interesting parallel with RPGNow's electronic distribution methods, it's probably most noteworthy for two things: having a *lot* of "traditional" publishers going along with them (some of them really big) and using Digital Rights Management to protect their documents. (Whether those two are related I will leave as an exercise for the reader.) Regardless, the prospect of hundreds of new, older, and out-of-print material now available for online purchase and electronic download has no doubt made many fans lick their lips.

Reality: 2

Steven: 3

I predicted that at least three games would be released, all having a very similar theme, genre, or world idea.

I was tied to my booth at GenCon, but best I can tell this didn't happen. Drat.

Reality: 3

Steven: 3

I predicted that computers would not add significantly to the gaming experience. I also predicted that MMORPGs would continue to be popular and profitable.

In hindsight, I find "failure of things to happen" predictions to be pretty lame ("I predict the moon will fail to explode, nor will it in any way give super-powers to any inhabitants of Earth."). Nevertheless, **World of Warcraft** is both a critical and fan-endorsed success, and I don't think **City of Heroes** existed back in 2003. So I'm going to count this one a success, too.

Reality: 3

Steven: 4

I'd predicted that two presumed-dead game lines would come back from the dead, published by different companies. **Paranoia** definitely qualifies, so I'm at at least one. As for #2 . . . well, I'm struggling, here. Sure, the **D6 System** came back after a long absence, but that was still being published by West End Games (a company which had been purchased by someone new). Some IPs came back, including **Conan** from Mongoose, but again I don't think that counts.

I think reality and I need to split the point, and rely on the teeming millions to let me know about a game (or game line) I missed which fulfills my criteria.

Reality: 3.5

Steven: 4.5

I predicted publishing companies trying more innovative methods to get their products out there; I also predicted other publishing houses would try the "miniseries" format made famous by White Wolf's **Orpheus** game line. With a few minor exceptions, both of these things utterly failed to happen.

Reality: 4.5

Steven: 4.5

Finally, I predicted that the game industry would gravitate toward more products which couldn't easily be duplicated or experienced outside of its physical form (such as **HeroClix**). This was more of a long-term prediction, so I'm not sure if I should count it here. Nevertheless, 2004 saw the release of **Pirates of the Spanish Main** as well as many books that also exist as objects de art (such as the **GURPS Slipcase**, **World's Largest Dungeon**, and **Authority RPG**). Nevertheless, I didn't see a product that fulfilled the criteria and captured the imagination like a **HeroClix** or **Magic: The Gathering**. So the point is split again.

Reality: 5

Steven: 5

On a casual glance, I seem to be little better than flipping a coin or consulting the Magic 8-Ball. And few of my predictions were *too* out there. On the other hand, I don't think there were any big events or happenings that I *didn't* predict, so I consider my meager success rate to be not too horrible.

In the next week or so, I'll probably reach into the hat and pull out a fresh batch of predictions. (Really, the longer I wait, the less year that's ahead of me . . . which means I look even more amazing.)

Until then, if you have any insights or comments about these predictions you'd like to offer, feel free to either [drop us a line](#) or stop on by [the discussion boards](#). We love to chat.

* * *

And speaking of chats ("+2 to your *make segue* roll"), we have a number of them coming up soon:

First, Friday January 7th (that's today, if you read *Pyramid* as soon as you can), **Steve Long** of [Hero Games](#) will be stopping by. It's bound to be a *super* time. (Get it? **Hero System** good for supers games? . . . nevermind.)

Then Tuesday, January 11th, we'll be having a [Guardians of Order](#) chat, with **Mark C. MacKinnon**, **Jesse Scoble**, and

Adam Jury stopping by to answer questions, fight rumors, and let us know what's happening in their Canadian neck of the woods.

Finally, Friday, Jan 14th, **Steve Jackson, Sean Punch**, and as many other of the [Steve Jackson Games](#) crew as can be mustered will be on-hand to chat. Reminisce about 2004, learn secrets about 2005, and more!

All chats are at 7pm CST, which is something like p:30 in Gretchen Mean Time or whatever the heck the rest of the world uses. For more information about joining us, check out [our chat page](#).

--Steven Marsh

Night's Move: The Chess-Playing Turk

"M. Maelzel had also constructed an automaton known all over Europe as the chess-player. . . . His Majesty took a chair, and sitting down opposite the automaton, said, laughing: "Come on, comrade; here's to us two." The automaton saluted and made a sign with the hand to the Emperor, as if to bid him begin. The game opened, the Emperor made two or three moves, and intentionally a false one. The automaton bowed, took up the piece and put it back in its place. His Majesty cheated a second time; the automaton saluted again, but confiscated the piece. "That is right," said His Majesty, and cheated the third time. Then the automaton shook its head, and passing its hand over the chess board, it upset the whole game."

-- Louis-Constant Wairy, *Private Life of Napoleon*

It was a life-sized wooden man, dressed in the robes and turban of a Turk. In its left hand, it languidly held a long pipe; the other stretched out across a cabinet top. The wooden cabinet itself (four feet long, three feet high, and two and a half feet deep) sat on castors. Three doors opened on the front of the cabinet. One revealed a dizzying nest of clockwork; the other, a compartment holding a mysterious casket, a gold-inlaid chess [board](#), and a red cushion. A long drawer below the doors held chess pieces. The operator removed these items, lit two candelabra on the cabinet top, placed the cushion beneath the Turk's elbow, removed the pipe, and set up the chess board for a game. After displaying the clockwork again to the audience, the operator then theatrically wound it up. Gears ground, pistons whirled, and the Turk's left arm stretched out to begin another game of chess. Over a career spanning almost seventy years, it almost never lost.

"In the year 1769, Mr. De Kempelen, being at Vienna, on some affairs relative to his official situation, was ordered to attend at Court, to assist as a connoisseur at some magnetic games . . . [during which he mentioned] . . . that he thought himself capable of constructing a machine, the power of which would be much more surprising, and the deception much more complete, than all which her majesty had just seen He kept his word, and in the space of six months, completed the intire formation of an Automaton, which surpasses every thing of the kind that has yet been seen."

-- Carl Gottlieb von Windisch, *Inanimate Reason*

The Turk debuted in the spring of 1770, in a command performance before Empress Maria Theresa of Austria. Wolfgang von Kempelen, a court engineer, presented the Turk for his first game, against the Count Cobenzl. The Turk won, and followed up by successfully demonstrating the Knight's Tour, a complex maneuver in which the knight moves through every square on the board from any starting point. After its vogue at court, Kempelen attempted to retire the Turk in 1773, claiming it was damaged and unable to play. But in 1781, the Emperor Joseph II ordered Kempelen to reassemble it for the Grand Duke Paul of Russia's visit, and to take it on tour. In Paris, the Turk defeated [Benjamin Franklin](#), and although the great Philidor won his game, he said no game had ever "fatigued him to the same extent." In London, Kempelen's "androides" were a sensation, and inspired Edmund Cartwright to invent the power loom. Kempelen returned to Vienna in 1785, but refused to demonstrate the Turk thereafter.

His son sold the Turk to Johann Nepomuk Maelzel, an inventor, in 1805. Maelzel had also invented a self-actuated orchestra (the Panharmonicon) and an automaton trumpet player; under his tutelage, the Turk spoke for the first time (saying *echec*, "check," when appropriate). Maelzel's Turk played Napoleon in 1809 at Schoenbrunn Palace (where Kempelen had designed the hydraulics decades before); it impressed the Bonapartes enough that Prince Eugene de Beauharnais, Napoleon's stepson, bought it from Maelzel in 1811. Maelzel bought it back in 1817 on credit, and took it on tour. The Turk now offered pawn and move to all comers; in London in 1820, it beat Charles Babbage at chess. But de Beauharnais' heirs were hounding Maelzel for the balance of their payment, and in 1825, Maelzel and the Turk hopped ship for America.

"When the question is demanded explicitly of Maelzel -- 'Is the Automaton a pure machine or not?' his reply is invariably the same -- 'I will say nothing about it.'"

-- Edgar Allan Poe, "Maelzel's Chess Player"

The Turk toured New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore (where it lost a game to Charles Carroll, the last surviving

signer of the Declaration of Independence), Richmond, Charleston, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Louisville, New Orleans, and Havana. In Richmond, it attracted the attention of [Edgar Allan Poe](#), who by sheer bull-headed induction (and careful attention to an earlier pamphlet by one Robert Willis), determined the truth -- that the Turk was secretly operated by Maelzel's assistant, William Schlumberger. As Tom Standage demonstrates in *The Turk*, the gears and clockwork were mere sleight-of-eye, intended to distract audiences from the small (but adequate) space inside the cabinet. The operator used a pantograph arm to move the Turk's arm from piece to piece, and tracked the games by means of a cunning series of magnets on the underside of the board. The Turk won so many games because its operators included some of the more formidable chess players in London and Paris, who seemed to treat a spell in the Turk as a lark, at least at first. One of them, Jacques-Francois Mouret, revealed the secret in a small journal in Paris in 1834.

"Many must be the adventures of the Automaton, lost, unhappily, to the knowledge of man. A being that kept so much good company, during so long a space of time, must, indeed, have gone through an infinity of interesting events."
-- George Walker, "Anatomy of the Chess Automaton"

Mouret did so because of his desperate alcoholism and poverty; he sold the secret of the Turk for a few bottles of brandy. Although chess circles in Paris supported Mouret, he had become paralyzed during his time in the Turk and died in 1837. The year after that, Schlumberger died of yellow fever in Havana. Old, alone except for his automata, and increasingly impoverished, Maelzel sailed for Philadelphia on July 14, 1838. He played two games of chess with the ship captain, losing the second one. He became enraged, withdrew to his cabin, and [drank](#) himself to death, dying after seven days alone with the Turk.

Maelzel's business partner John Ohl claimed the Turk, and sold it in 1840 to a local doctor, one John Mitchell. Mitchell, the Poe family doctor, put on a series of "debunking" Turk shows for a private club in 1840, revealing the secret to his fellows. He then donated the Turk to the Chinese Museum, originally founded to house the collection of Charles Wilson Peale. P.T. Barnum, who met Maelzel at an early age, built the American Museum in New York from another Peale collection, and may have raided the Chinese Museum for choice exhibits -- but not the Turk. It perished in a fire on July 5, 1854; Mitchell's son Silas, on the scene, claimed to hear the Turk's last words: *Echec! Echec!*

"This child has never opened a work of chess... In the opening he makes the right moves as if by inspiration; and it is astonishing to note the precision of his calculations in the middle and end game."
-- Ernest Morphy, on his nephew Paul

Interestingly, America's greatest ever chess champion, Paul Morphy, was born on the summer solstice of 1837, seven months after the Turk toured New Orleans. A chess prodigy who seemingly knew the game from his earliest years, at the age of nine Morphy defeated General Winfield Scott. At age 17, he defeated the president of the American Chess Congress, and the next year defeated all comers at the Congress' tournament in New York. In 1858, he traveled to Europe, where he overwhelmingly defeated Lowenthal, Harrwitz, and Anderssen, and destroyed the top players in London, Paris, and elsewhere in multiple blind matches. The English chess authority Staunton managed to avoid playing Morphy directly, although he lost a consultation game to Morphy's partner Barnes. Morphy challenged anyone in the world to play him at the Turk's odds of pawn and move, but found no one who could match him. In October of 1861 in Richmond (where Poe and the Turk crossed paths 26 years before), Morphy supposedly beat the Devil at chess, rescuing an "impossible" position painted by Moritz Retzsch in "Man vs. Mephistopheles." By age thirty, Morphy had abandoned chess entirely. He became a paranoid schizophrenic, ranting the phrase "He will plant the banner of the Castile on the walls of Madrid, screaming: The city is conquered and the little king will have to go" while walking around the French Quarter swinging his gold-headed cane. He died of apoplexy in a cold bath at the age of 47.

"I see, now, that the mysterious being who communicates with us by the medium of the Turk, has powers at his command which compel our most secret thoughts with magic might; it may be that this strange intelligence clearly and distinctly beholds that germ of the future which is being formed within us in mysterious connection with the outer world . . ."
-- Ferdinand, in "Automata" by E.T.A. Hoffmann

Did Mouret and his fellow masters sweat their spirit into the dark box of the mysterious, proto-computational Turk? (Being immured inside the cabinet, with magnets above and a chessboard below, must have been as close as you could get to a steampunk sensory-deprivation tank -- an ideal setting for psychic experimentation.) Did that spirit emerge in the chess-board grid of old New Orleans during a dark Saturnalia in 1836? Did it transfer itself to Paul Morphy, he of the "preternaturally small" hands and feet, who possessed "bumps" betokening "possession of the calculating faculty" according to an amateur phrenologist's description? Is this the meaning of Kempelen's epitaph, *Non omnis moriar*, "I do not die completely"? Kempelen, interestingly, spent much of his time after the Turk's tour building [speaking heads](#) - he knew better than to instill such oracular power in his creation, a feat which awaited the more foolish Maelzel.

From here, as they say in chess, the variations become unsound. But perhaps this is why Staunton feverishly edited the works of [Shakespeare](#) instead of playing Morphy, seeking dramaturgic armor against the calculating spirit of the new age. Perhaps Morphy's habitual sacrifices of his Queen indicate some anti-fertility ritual more appropriate to an automaton than a son of hot-blooded New Orleans. So what might have happened to the Turk's spirit after Morphy's death? Could it have been captured by the British Chess Association, founded two weeks afterward by the conspiratorially-connected Randolph Churchill and the Grail-poet Tennyson? Did they sponsor the 1865 creation of Ajeeb, the second chess-playing Turk, who haunted the Polytechnic alongside [Pepper's Ghost](#)? (Ajeeb, interestingly, also perished in an American fire, on Coney Island on March 15, 1929.) Did that spirit (or a portion of it captured kabbalistically by his rabbi father) pass into William Steinitz, the next World Chess Champion, born in 1836? It's suggestive that Steinitz began championship play the year of Ajeeb's creation, and lost the world championship the year Ajeeb's creator sold him to an American. Steinitz, interestingly, believed he could move the pieces by (automatic?) electricity, and claimed to have offered God Morphy's odds of pawn and move. Like Morphy, Steinitz died insane. Interestingly, Bobby Fischer (also paranoid, also American, also a cometary chess prodigy) claimed to be Morphy reincarnated. Even more interestingly, like the Turk, Fischer plays left-handed. The Knight's Tour goes anywhere and everywhere. Somewhere, then, the clockwork hands of the Turk reach out and grasp a pawn -- but we may not be able to hear the *echec* above the rising flames.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Chretien's Garden

for *Nobilis*

by Bradley Robins

"It was Chretien who saved that world from the ending the gods' hubris wrought. Alone he walked through the wastes, gathering the few last tribes that had not succumbed to madness. His words united, his vision gave hope. Together they traveled across the waste, avoiding the frayed edges of reality when they could, driving oblivion back with blood and hope when they could not. The journey took decades, and only when Chretien was very old did they finally come to the sea.

"In the green of a forgotten garden, where a wall of rocks fronted on the sea, Chretien had them build an altar of earth, stones, and thorns from the dying ground growing. Around it the people danced and sang, bodies swaying full of hope, which Chretien had given them. With writhing arms and brightening eyes they pounded out rhythm with their feet till a song was born in the still air. Round and round they spun, souls immolating like the shells of moths burning incandescent even after the candle's wick has gone out. Their pulse was thunder, and dancer and dance were one.

"Old Chretien, with his ragged gray beard laced with Chamomile and Amaranth, lay himself down upon the altar and whispered to his parents that he was coming home. Kamin, first of Chretien's children, took up the knife and with tears in his eyes he ended one life that the world might live. Upon his altar Chretien died, and from his godlike heart burst the Great Oak whose roots sunk into the sea, whose roots delved into the earth, whose roots were anchored in the flesh of man."

From *The Annals of Oak*

In the endless struggles between Light and Dark there have been many times when the Dark has come within an inch of final victory. Always the Light has managed to save humanity at the last moment, but rarer are the times when humanity has been able to save itself. When the Dark separated from Earth and then pulled down the green realm of Khahat, its noblest human did not let his land fall, nor his people end. Chretien -- botanist and seer -- gathered together the remnants of humanity and performed a great ritual which saved everything he had loved. His sacrifice not only formed the Great Oak which wards the realm, it drew the attention of the Emperor Saurast. Seeing Chretien's land as the very symbol of humanity's nobility and potential, he imbued himself into the Oak and the land, turning Chretien's Garden into a chancel of the Light.

The whole of Chretien's Garden lies under the branches of the Great Oak, a mirror of the World Ash which holds up the sky of the locus and holds back the worlds beyond with the shade of its branches and the never-still rustle of its leaves. The Oak dominates all of chancel life from religion to science and leisure, for it provides everything the residents need -- including immortality. Nothing in Chretien's Garden ever truly dies. Though bodies may decay and blow away as dust, the soul will never sleep or be lost and only the memory of what it was to need and lust can ever fade to forgetfulness. The ghosts of those whose bodies have expired linger on to watch over their descendants and to yearn after the heated pleasures they can no longer feel. Little true loss is ever felt by the residents, but in turn they feel little true hope; the endless days of shadow and leaf song are all they will ever know.

In order to drive back the ennui that too often settles over the Garden, the residents have developed an intricate religion that includes endless festivals and rites. Apotheosis with the Great Oak is constantly sought, as is communion with the panting, desperate need that formed the Oak. From high branches they harvest acorns whose meat is the flesh of humans, and tap sap which spills as red blood. Feasting on the flesh and blood they dance mighty ecstatic dances, dervish spinning as spirits and bodies yearn for the joy and burning lust for life that is the one thing they have forgotten. Most are able to return to their lives refreshed, with their vigor and lust restored, but it is not uncommon for men to dance their bodies to nothingness, and for their spirits to dance on ever after, never able to be still while the yearning in their heart haunts them.

Arts and sciences provide another avenue for the residents to remind themselves of why they live, and in the Garden both are quite advanced in study and practice. Weird sciences which combine botany and human biochemistry are the most common and prestigious. The endless influence of the tree has led to science being able to make humans who are not fully human, who feed by photosynthesis, regenerate, and have great, slow strength. The arts are similarly advanced, with sculptures of living wood and mosaics made from a million shades of fallen leaf covering square miles of the Oak's trunk. Combinations of art and science turn many of the enhanced into biological works of art, creatures of beauty that may not be fully human. Many of those who undergo the most radical alterations hope that by doing so they will achieve unity with the Oak, and thus find the dreams that have been lost. It is not lost on the servitors of Light that their perfect realm of immortal humanity may slowly become something other than human, but for now they are unsure what to do about it. It does not help that at least two of the resident powers, Istee and Dura, actively encourage and support "alternate humanities" such as ghosts and cyborgs. Such positions often put Chretien's Garden in politically ambiguous waters with other Powers of the Light.

Though art and science are much advanced, the architecture and infrastructure of Chretien's Garden is simple to the point of being backward. Sheltered from any extreme by the Oak, and given all they need to live from its branches, the people have never felt the need to produce great strings of supply and demand, or to build houses that are much more than hollows in a great root. This lack of drive and supply has retarded their sciences and arts to a certain extent, and while some of the philosophers are aware of the problem, none have the energy or drive that it would take to form a full government or infrastructure in such a land of ease and plenty. What little control and regulation there is comes from the Nobles, who often have difficulty getting the residents to take proper care of themselves.

The only time that the endless stretching time of Chretien's Garden is interrupted is on nights of the new moon. During the darkness of the sky, the wind dies to the slightest whisper and the leaves go nearly still. Around the edges of the locus the protection of the Oak wanes, and creatures from the fallen, mad world beyond are able to enter freely. At the edges of the Garden are not one, but two, chancels of the Dark and the mad beasts and Nobles may enter the chancel freely on those nights. Though the Oak grants some protection against their power it cannot stop them from entering, and once they are in it cannot compel them to leave. Though the residents of the realm are not defenseless they lack the training and will to fight, and Saurast himself only rarely turns his attention to the locus. Thus the agents of the Dark are free to stock and seduce, to kidnap and to torment until the chancel's Nobles are able to intervene.

Chretien's Garden

Defender's Blessing 3 (6 pts)

Magical Inhabitants: Ghosts and Biomods, common and anchorable (4 pts)

Weird Science: Biotechnology and Botany (2 pts)

Enemy Gates (-4 pts)

More Questions than Answers

The Brass Ring

by Chris Aylott

Let's have a show of hands here. How many of you reading this would like to make a good living as a game designer?

Not the "hand-to-mouth, eat lots of ramen and hope you don't get sick because you can't afford health insurance" life of most hobby game designers. I'm talking enough money to raise a family, own a home, work reasonable hours and stock your liquor cabinet with the good booze. A fat royalty check to go with the thrill of seeing your games making people happy.

This is not an unreasonable goal, is it? Am I correct in thinking that there is nobody here who says to himself, "Gee, I'd love to design games, and the lousy pay just makes it better!" Right?

With that in mind then, with the understanding that the typical hobby games paycheck falls far short of an unlimited blow and hookers lifestyle, let me ask this question.

"What does it take to make a million dollars designing games?"

You'd Need the Money from 66 *Monopoly* Sets to Pay Him

Yes, it really is possible to make a million dollars as a game designer. Charles Darrow was the first one to do it, with the royalties he earned from ***Monopoly***. He used the money to change careers from "unemployed salesman and inventor" to "retired game designer."

Darrow got on the road to riches by selling copies of ***Monopoly*** to friends and local department stores. His handmade sets cost \$4 each, about \$52 in 2003 dollars. At first, he could only produce two copies a day. Having a friend print up the game boards upped Darrow's production to six copies per day, which still wasn't nearly enough.

Darrow then produced 5,000 copies and sold them to department stores in Philadelphia and New York City. The success of the game caught the attention of Parker Brothers (which had rejected it earlier, one of the most famous blunders in game publishing), which bought the game and began producing it on a national level. In 1935, Parker Brothers was selling 20,000 copies of ***Monopoly*** a week, and current owner Hasbro still sells several million copies per year.

Charles Darrow wasn't a brilliant game designer or businessman. In fact, there is convincing evidence that he plagiarized the design of ***Monopoly*** from a similar game played by friends from Atlantic City. Other games similar to ***Monopoly*** have existed since 1904. So if the ideas and design of ***Monopoly*** had been around for years, why wasn't the game already famous?

The answer may lie in how the game was presented. Early versions of ***Monopoly*** presented the game as an warning of the evils of unrestrained capitalism. Darrow turned that idea around and stressed the fantasy of being a rich and powerful tycoon. Same game, new attitude. The anti-capitalist ***Monopoly*** appealed to a few Quakers scattered around New England; Darrow's fantasy appealed to millions.

They Didn't Call It T\$R for Nothing

You don't have to have a game that appeals to everyone to have a roaring success (though it helps). Case in point: ***Dungeons and Dragons***.

You already know most of the story. Wargamer Gary Gygax needed a way to reignite his friends' interest in his medieval warfare simulation. He could have worn slinky lingerie to his next play session -- putting us all in a very different hobby today -- but he added a different fantasy element: wizards who could cast fireballs and other spells. The friends were excited, the rules were tested and improved, and ***Chainmail*** and its fantasy supplement were published in 1971.

Shortly afterwards, Gygax and friend Dave Arneson began stretching the ***Chainmail*** wargame rules into new scenarios emphasizing individual characters and more fantasy elements. Developing the game and shopping it around took over two years, with Gygax deciding to publish the game himself in 1973. He, Arneson, and two other friends formed a new company named Tactical Studies Rules; ***Dungeons and Dragons*** was published in January 1974.

The game sold 1,000 copies in its first 10 months, 2,000 copies in the six months that followed, then 3,000 copies in the summer of 1975. The company's sales passed half a million dollars in 1977. By 1979, ***Dungeons & Dragons*** was selling 7,000 copies a month, and in 1980, ***Dungeons and Dragons*** hit the national spotlight. Sales exploded -- \$8.7 million in 1980, \$14 million in 1981, \$100 million in 1985.

The original ***Dungeons & Dragons*** can be best described as "cheap and ugly," and the less said about Gygax's prose style the better. Yet the game sold, sold more, and kept selling faster and faster until it broke into the mass market. Zero to \$100 million in just 11 years? That's a growth curve any tycoon could envy, and it was built on a few thousand dollars of investment.

It took a few years and some lucky breaks for ***Dungeons and Dragons*** to tip over into the mass consciousness, but ***Dungeons & Dragons*** shared a key characteristic with ***Monopoly***: from the beginning, the rate at which it sold kept accelerating. The first thousand copies of ***Dungeons & Dragons*** were the hardest to sell; after that the game was off and running.

If at First You Don't Succeed, Gamble Everything

Q: What cost \$75 to make and sold for \$15 wholesale?

A: Each of the first 1,100 copies of ***Trivial Pursuit***.

Sometimes you have to wonder if sales momentum can overcome any obstacle. The ***Trivial Pursuit*** story has such bizarre twists that nobody would believe it as fiction.

On December 15, 1979, Canadian newspapermen Chris Haney and Scott Abbott got together for a game of ***Scrabble*** and found pieces of the game missing. This somehow lead to an argument over who would be the better game designer, and a few hours later to the basic concepts of ***Trivial Pursuit***.

Over the next few months, Haney and Abbott found two more partners and a few thousand dollars in seed money, forming the Horn Abbot company in January 1980. By November 1981, they had made the first 1,100 sets of their game at a cost of \$75 per set. They had no trouble selling this test run to retailers for \$15 per game, instantly losing \$66,000.

(The retailers, in turn, sold the games at \$29.95, considered a ridiculously high price for board games at the time. It's equivalent to about \$65 in today's money.)

Encouraged by their success, Horn Abbot took ***Trivial Pursuit*** to the 1982 Toy Fairs in Montreal and New York City. They expected to sell thousands of copies; retailers shrugged, and ordered a total of 400.

I'm trying to imagine what it would be like to put in three years of effort, to have already lost most of a hundred grand, and to be looking at orders that aren't even half of your test run. I can't quite do it, but I'm pretty sure I'd given up then and there.

What did Horn Abbot do? Round up some more money to pay the bills, then print up 20,000 more copies of **Trivial Pursuit**, knowing that even if they sold every copy they'd earn barely enough to break even on the run. The only justification for this insane gamble? The knowledge that the stores who sold those 1,100 test copies wanted more.

The gamble paid off. The second run did sell out, quickly enough that Selchow and Righter got interested and took the game on for the U.S. market. They sent a direct mail campaign to the 1,800 buyers attending Toy Fair 1983, and this time the buyers paid attention. **Trivial Pursuit** became an "overnight sensation." The game sold over three million copies in 1983, and 20 million in 1984.

In a final twist to the story, Selchow and Righter was stuck with 20 million copies of **Trivial Pursuit** in its inventory when the fad crashed. The company collapsed and was sold to Coleco, which went bankrupt and was bought in 1988. Selchow and Righter also made **Scrabble**, the game with the missing pieces that inspired Haney and Abbott to try their hand at game design.

That's a long way to go for a revenge plot.

Lessons from the Big Guys . . .

As I look at these and other classic games, the same story keeps cropping up. Most of them start fast, selling as quickly as their creators can make them. They spread by word of mouth, often with little or no advertising, and after a few years hit a critical mass that garners national attention and huge sales.

Yahtzee went into commercial production because friends of the inventors demanded copies of their own, and spread when the manufacturer began holding "**Yahtzee** parties" to introduce the game to others. **Cranium** became the fastest-selling independent board game in history without spending a dime on traditional advertising. Out of the Box Games has sold over a million copies of **Apples to Apples** in five years on the strength of people playing the game with their friends. And again, we all know the tale of a little game called **Magic: the Gathering**.

Another common element is that the inventors of games usually hand off the game to someone else before it becomes truly successful. There are exceptions -- Gary Gygax and **Dungeons and Dragons**, the inventors of **Cranium** -- but Charles Darrow, Haney and Abbot, Richard Garfield and **Apples to Apples** inventor Matthew Kirby didn't taste true success until after they handed their baby over for somebody else to raise.

. . . But Do They Apply to the Small?

All this seems to work within our hobby as well as in the larger game industry. Take **Lunch Money**, designed by Charlie Wiedman and published by Atlas Games in 1996. The first print run sold out in three weeks, and it has been a best-seller for Atlas Games ever since.

Atlas Games publisher John Nephew describes **Lunch Money** as a "viral" game. "People playing the game tend to have a lot of fun -- loudly. That attracts attention and interest, leading other people to try it."

It's a trait that attracts retailers as much as it attracts customers. "One lucky bit of timing," Nephew says, "was that the weekend after it arrived in our warehouse was the Chessex Midwest Open House. Our sales manager at the time, Woody Eblom, went to the open house and packed up several extra cases of product in his trunk. He figured once people played the game, the stock that Chessex had just received would not be nearly enough."

"Sure enough, when retailers sat down and started playing the game amongst themselves, it was a hit. Chessex took every bit that Woody had brought with him (and soon ordered more), and a lot of retailers went home and started pushing the game."

Lunch Money is a little bit too edgy to make it in the mass market, which shies away at the idea of cute little girls beating each other up. However, Atlas Games has just released **Gloom**, a cheerfully melancholy card game in which

you help your Gothic family of characters suffer tragedies and untimely deaths. Will this Lemony Snicket-like mix of Edward Gorey and Charles Addams be a big hit? Nephew may know sooner rather than later.

Prescription for Success

So, how *do* you make a million dollars as a game designer? Maybe the best thing to do is to come up with (or steal) an irresistible concept, a game that makes the friends of your friends' friends demand copies of their own. Sell that to somebody else who has with enough money and savvy to manufacture it . . . and then have the good sense to let it go and get out of the way.

Now doesn't that sound easy?

Still Calling After All of These Years . . .

Keeping *Call of Cthulhu* Fresh and Interesting to Veteran Players (Without Going Mad)

by J. Edward Tremlett

It has been said that, while *Call of Cthulhu* deserves its props as the great old granddaddy of all Horror RPGs, it can get a bit long in the tooth. And that's because -- as has *also* been remarked -- the Mythos that forms the game's backdrop is both the greatest strength and greatest weakness of the game. Given enough time, the great mind-shattering mystery of the Mythos will wear thin, just like a party piece that loses its charm after a few too many applications.

Having ministered the Mythos for almost 15 years, myself, I have to agree on all counts. *Call of Cthulhu* is still a fun game to play, and run, but I've come to recognize in some veteran players a certain ennui that creeps in, over time. And it goes beyond simple burnout; such players actually get jaded on the whole Cthulhu deal, and once that's gone, so are most of their reasons for wanting to play.

Why? Well, there are as many reasons for this problem as there are players who suffer this malady. But I feel that, for many veterans of the game, it boils down to what seems a self-evident statement: The players are not their Investigators.

Players do not start out as blank slates with every game. There's nothing better than the first time you pull the curtain back and astound your players, and their Investigators, with the comic horrors that lay beyond. But with each new unfurling of that dark curtain, the piece gets a little less mind-blowing, a little less horrifying, and a little less unexpected to those players. Before you know it, even the appearance of mighty Cthulhu, Himself, is just a 1D10/1D100 SAN Loss (and a good excuse to make a new character).

Now, that doesn't mean that the tentacle party's over -- far from it. A Keeper with a dedicated and complimentary group of players can still pack in a crowd at the gaming table, in spite of this handicap. But if you want to keep the game fresh and interesting for everyone, and not just the new meat . . . er, *players*, , then you have to be very creative (and sneaky) in how you do your voodoo.

Here, then, are some ideas on how to keep veteran players down in their chairs long after they've seen R'lyeh.

The Standard Advice

Various Chaosium publications have offered up some time-tested nuggets of wisdom, such as throwing red herrings at the Investigators, and never over-using the "stock" creatures of the Mythos.

I'll second these anytime, but be very careful about Scenarios based entirely around a red herring. I find that one "gotcha" adventure can be fun, and is good enough to show the players that you're *capable* of sending their characters careening after a wild goose. But if you do it more than once, you might lose some credibility, and they'll really wonder if you're just jerking them around.

Chaosium's materials also emphasize that you should never underestimate the horror caused by mad or bad human beings, and I'll second that as well. In the real world, we didn't need the corrupting influence of the Mythos to produce awful cult leaders (Charles Manson), deranged killers (Peter Kurten), diabolical madmen (Dr. Josef Mengele), murderous tyrants ("Emperor" Bokassa), or other monsters in human shape.

Adding the Mythos can add a new dimension to the actions of such people, and create an avenue for exploring their

actions in the game. But the fact that humanity is capable of being downright evil *without* having read "Cultes des Goules" is in keeping with Lovecraft's nihilistic view of the universe. It's also about as real as it gets.

And as for keeping certain "stock" critters from being commonplace threats, I'll not only second that, too, but advise you to . . .

Keep the Big Guns Far Away

In fact, I'm starting the question the wisdom of having any of the "signature," super-bad Mythos entities show up in person at all. As much fun as it can be to say that your Investigator tangled with Yog-Sothoth, Hastur, Shub-Niggurath or the big "C," Himself, in reality there should be no way for the party to survive such an encounter with their lives *or* their sanity intact. The terrible and powerful creatures at the heart of the Mythos should blast such puny mortals to pieces, change them over into their slaves, or feed them to the masses of servitor creatures that accompany them.

As such, I'd recommend that you keep the curtain drawn really tightly on appearances from such entities. Use the *threat* of them appearing, rather than their actual appearance, as the climax of a major Campaign. And if the big nasty does indeed show up, then pick a harrowing moment to ask for everyone's character sheets, and leave them to wonder what happened.

To keep things interesting (and survivable), I recommend that all appearances of well-known Great Old Ones or Outer Gods be relatively "weak" Avatars or possessed servants. Alternatively, have their "presence" be some other strange effect that wreaks untold devastation without the God even having to appear. If you absolutely must have a Mythos Deity show up, pick one of the lesser-known, and less-powerful, ones from the ***Creature Companion***.

One of the problems with this approach is that, in all honesty, you'd have to nix the actual appearance of Nyarlathotep, too. And when you have a god with 1,000 forms, it seems absolutely criminal not to have one of them show up, at least once. All the same, I'd urge Keepers to keep this God's Avatars more felt than actually *seen*; horror often comes from what is imagined, rather than what is witnessed.

Chop Up (or Chuck) The Published Scenarios

Call of Cthulhu's published Scenarios have always been of a high standard, and still reverberate with good gruesome fun, even up to 20 years after their first printing. However, by the time you get around to running one of them, the chances are good that your ***Call of Cthulhu*** vets have already taken part in it.

Now, you could be sneaky, and use those old Scenarios as a framework for a completely different adventure. After all, it would be a shame to have those NPCs and place descriptions go to complete waste. All you'd have to do is just change the prologue and particulars around to fit another reason for the Scenario's circumstances, and away you go.

On the other hand, if reverse-engineering ***Shadows of Yog-Sothoth*** isn't your cup of tea, you could just do away with the store-bought Scenarios altogether. Save these ancient gems for groups of newer players, and let them savor the excellence of those dark and glorious treats. Meanwhile, give your veteran players brand new Scenarios of your own devising, using the published ones as inspiration, rather than an exact guide.

New Toys to Play With

One of the simplest things to do, when creating a new Scenario, is to introduce a creature that none of the players have ever dealt with before. The longer a gamer's been playing the game, the harder this becomes, but the really obscure critters, servitors, GOOs, and Outer Gods might have slipped their notice. And then there's always goodies from brand-new books they haven't gotten hold of yet, too.

This can work wonders. I had a number of players utterly and completely baffled when they encountered traces of

Xada-Hgla -- especially since their Investigators only *heard* the name ("Say The Glay?' What the hell is that?") and could not, therefore, justify a Cthulhu Mythos roll. It would be several sessions before they learned it was a terrifying Avatar of Azathoth (The ***Creature Companion***, pg. 62), and by then they were in its lair . . .

The big problem with this is obvious: You can only keep ahead of the players' learning curve for so long with brand new books, and the old ones have probably already been played out. This approach might also turn the game into the New Monster of the Month Club, not to mention severely cluttering the game, and possibly even making the Mythos a little *too* cosmopolitan.

As such, I recommend only pulling this once in a while, when you've got an entity that's just too good to pass up.

Going Beyond

The main book reminds us that, just as Lovecraft didn't only write Mythos stories, Keepers don't only have to run Mythos Scenarios. Indeed, a lot of fun can be had with situations that have absolutely *nothing* to do with the Mythos at all. Lovecraft invoked such horrors as ancestral memory gone awry, the thirst for horrible knowledge, ancient curses coming back around again, fiendish grave-robbing and horrid cannibalism. Any Keeper could exploit such sinister seeds to make a Scenario.

Meanwhile, "traditional" monsters can also exist in the ***Call of Cthulhu*** game world, if the Keeper so desires, allowing for Scenarios based around vampires, werewolves, ghosts or the walking dead. And not all magic needs to be Mythos magic, either, which leads into very nice tales of good magic gone bad, or bad magic gone straight to hell. (Allowances are made for Voodoo and African magic, but why stop there?)

Such monsters and situations can also make an amusing red herring for jaded ***Call of Cthulhu*** players. They might think that the truth behind the myth of the vampire is the star vampire, but what will they think when their investigator runs into a real, "live" bloodsucker? And what will they do when they see that not all zombies come from the Severn valley?

Change It Around

Another thing that can be done is to take established entities and situations and shake them up. By scrambling what was previously known about them, or presenting them in a brand new way, you not only gain more control over the world you want to present, but get to surprise players who thought they knew it all. At the very least it throws them for a loop.

Once, when presenting an encounter with the Hastur Mythos, I had the Investigators run into a planned production of "El Rey en Rojo," done by some dodgy artists' collective. The senior player at the table wasn't quite sure about this, as, being a Spanish speaker, it flew against her understanding ("Rojo" is red . . . but the play is 'The King in Yellow?")

But towards the end, they realized that the artist coordinating this effort suffered from some odd, mental condition. This caused the girl to see yellow as red, and red yellow, in *all* things: visual, cognitive and literary. So the King in Yellow, to her, became the King in Red, and by the time the party figured this out they were already lost in Carcosa . . .

And speaking of Hastur, we shouldn't overlook the radical reworking of the Hastur Mythos in Pagan Publishing's ***Delta Green***. By turning the Great Old One from a bloated squid into entropy, itself, heralded by the King in Yellow, the setting is given a real kick in the pants. (It also makes for some brilliant surrealist and psychological horror.)

Picking Up the Pieces

What happens if the party misses the flashpoint by a few months, or even years? You could have their Investigators

come upon a situation where the Gods have come and gone, the servitors have vacated the premises, and all that remains is the twisted human wreckage that results when ordinary humanity encounters the Mythos. Elvis has left the building, leaving dangerous echoes of himself . . .

Things can get downright bizarre, twisted, murderous, and sick when such a close call reduces the sanity of the one, the few or the many. Close encounters with the Mythos often leads to the breakdown of charismatic and/or enterprising individuals, which can lead, in turn, to the spawning of cults, serial murder, even more subtle and drastic social ills. When the society of an entire village, town, or city breaks down, there's more than enough to keep a Scenario going for ages.

And best of all, the monster that caused the mess need never be seen, much less completely identified. This may cause a problem, as some veterans will feel let down if they never actually encounter the entity responsible for the mess. However, if you keep the tension high and the suspense at a hard, steady boil, they might also feel just as vindicated by ending the mess, itself.

Fearing The Unknown

Hand-in-hand with never actually *seeing* the monster, we should remember that the menace that is only ever glimpsed is the most terrifying thing in the world. Much like the titular creatures from *Alien* and John Carpenter's remake of *The Thing*, the unseen entity could be anywhere, and could be anything, or possibly even anyone. And if the horror decreases the moment the monster is seen, then why blow its cover at all?

This approach not only keeps veteran players guessing as to what the entity could be, but also works to keep them on their toes. Each time they just miss seeing the thing responsible means another round of collecting new information, and adjusting their plans. It also keeps them from making Cthulhu Mythos rolls, as they just can't quite narrow it all down.

The most logical end for such a Scenario is for the monster to go back into hibernation, the Dreamlands, outer space, or wherever it came from. It might also move on to better pastures, rather than deal with these pesky Investigators. The party might think they've defeated it, and you can give them SAN bonuses accordingly, only to hit them with a SAN Check when the killings start up again, months or years later.

The Enemy Within

Horror doesn't just have to come from without in *Call of Cthulhu*, but also from within. The mind wasn't made to take the kind of shocks that the game provides your characters, and the game's sanity rules are an attempt to replicate what happens when someone's world gets turned upside down -- rather violently, at that.

However, those rules often get treated as just another mechanic. When your players are asking "How long before Harvey stops being afraid of fat women?" and "How many months before I can bring Joey out of the asylum?" you might get the idea that it's not sinking in. And maybe you should do something about that.

Whenever someone's character gets smacked with the bad side of a SAN Check, this is your chance to shine. Make certain that what happens to the poor Investigator fits the current circumstances -- and his state of mind -- as perfectly as possible. Take him out of the situation, and into the quiet and terrible world created by his mind, as much as possible.

In fact, if the Investigator is going to be "out of it" for a while, you might ask the player to leave the room. You can then play the Investigator yourself, and once the problem's alleviated -- if only for the moment -- the player can come back. Having to catch up in-character, and be told what he or she did while moonstruck, really drives the experience home. (An advanced option would be to have the other players in on the gag, and ask them to describe certain odd things they "do" and "say" to the character from here on out. These are, of course, hallucinations and delusions, just like the ones you will be throwing at the Investigator, yourself. However, having everyone else in on it make the

experience even more destabilizing.)

If an Investigator winds up in the asylum, then don't let them just sit there until they're "cured." Institutionalizations should be roleplayed out, rather than spoken of, in the hopes that the players really understand what's going on. This can be done in private sessions (once a month) with the players involved, or you could get the other players in on it too, roleplaying doctors, matrons, or fellow inmates. You could even have a minor Scenario take place during this "downtime," inside the mental hospital, involving these new characters. However, some veteran players might remember a certain, classic published Scenario that took place inside an asylum, and see it coming.

Hopefully the experience will drive home one of the true questions of the game. Once the Investigators are "cured," outside, and free, will they really want to risk that sanity and freedom by getting back on the same trail that brought them to madness? Will they rejoin their comrades and risk it all, or will they just retire?

And will the Mythos let them . . . ?

Tie It In

One of the reasons why Pagan Publishing's previously-mentioned ***Delta Green*** setting works so well -- other than being so good -- is that it takes the Mythos and wraps it around something fresh and new. By tapping into the *X-Files*-esque conspiracy vibe, coupled with Millennial fears, governmental intrigue, and a healthy dose of paranoia, the game hooks ***Call of Cthulhu*** up with an equally evocative setting. The resulting synergy makes for some great roleplaying, and provides a new thrill for otherwise-jaded, veteran ***Call of Cthulhu*** players.

So why not do something similar? ***Delta Green*** is definitely worth your time to try, but if they don't like it, or you don't want to run it, there are other, published options. ***The Dreamlands*** setting provides an interesting take on the game, and while it's devilishly difficult to find material for the ***Cthulhu by Gaslight*** setting, it's more than worth the effort to try. There's the new ***Dark Ages*** setting to consider, too.

Alternately, come up with your own historical setting to tie things into. Meld the Mythos with one of the World Wars, and play out a campaign where your soldiers, sailors, civvies, or spies do their investigating with the war as a backdrop. Or any other war, for that matter -- especially if you can tie the Mythos into the enemy, your own side, or both sides at once. Take them back to Renaissance Italy, pagan Rome, or the Wild West. Have them be pirates on the Spanish Main, monks in medieval France, or warriors of the last Shogunate. Base them out of Beijing, Arusha, or Abu Dhabi. Do anything, anywhere you like and at any time, as long as it's something new and exciting.

You could also take a cue from ***GURPS Cthulhupunk*** and drop the players into some fantastical, alternate-history game world, like Victorian-era steampunk, *Sky Captain*-style pulp action, or a supers campaign. However, there's a danger of overwhelming the players' sense of "the other," and making the Mythos just one part of the amazing backdrop. There's also the danger of no longer having it be "proper" ***Call of Cthulhu***, too, but such a charge is of little importance if both you and your players -- new and veteran -- are having fun. Do what pleases you, and let the game purists hang.

This might seem like a lot of work, and it is. But the payoff for you and your veteran players can be dynamite if it all goes well. Which brings us to my final suggestion: when all else fails . . .

Make It All Up

Just because it's ***Call of Cthulhu*** doesn't mean that Cthulhu has to be real. Maybe there is no Cthulhu, no Nyarlathotep, no Deep Ones, and no Dholes. Maybe there's nothing fishy in Innsmouth, the *Necronomicon* is just a cheesy "occult" paperback, and R'lyeh just a metaphor (like Atlantis, or Eutopia).

Maybe the "Mythos" -- as written by those pesky, human writers, like the gentleman from Providence -- was just their limited, human attempt to put a name to the cosmic horror that awaits us at the limits of our imagination. Maybe the

ideas still hold, but the stories were all wrong, and almost nothing is really as described. Or maybe the Lovecraft Circle were in on the game, and willfully distorting the truth for a buck and a cruel laugh . . .

So what's the truth, then? Well, that's what you get to decide, and your players and Investigators get to find out.

Completely redoing the Mythos, as published, and coming up with your own version of "the truth" may seem daunting, and it's probably the most labor-intensive solution of all. However, it may be the best route to go if your veterans can't get any satisfaction, otherwise. It will also make the game indisputably yours, and provide you with an extra degree of control over "the rules" (not that you, as Keeper, didn't have it already).

Keep in mind that you don't have to do it all at once. Start out small and work your way up, down, or sideways. Your Investigators will only uncover it one step at a time, so you only have to be one or two steps ahead of them. Introduce new elements only when they're called for, or you think the Investigators can really handle them.

And don't feel like you have to drive yourself nuts writing down every single thing, either. If your players' Investigators will most likely never live to learn the entire secret prehistory of the world, why write the whole thing down? A couple of hard facts will work wonders, and you can spiral things out from there.

Dutch Schultz

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Stephen Dedman

Biography

"Dutch Schultz" was born Arthur Simon Flegenheimer in 1902, in the Bronx, and grew up in the tough Bergen and Webster Avenues section. His father abandoned the family when Arthur was 14; Flegenheimer left school and began his criminal career by holding up crap games that refused to pay a percentage to the local mobster. At seventeen, he was arrested for burglary, and caused so much trouble at the brutal Blackwell's Island prison that he was transferred to the even tougher Westhampton Farms.

After Prohibition came into effect, Flegenheimer -- now calling himself "Dutch Schultz" after a notorious 19th century gangster - became involved in the bootlegging business, driving a beer truck for Arnold Rothstein, and working alongside Charles "Lucky" Luciano (see *GURPS Who's Who 2*) as a goon for Legs Diamond. By 1928, he had intimidated most other speakeasy owners in the Bronx into buying beer exclusively from him. When one refused, he was kidnapped, hung by his thumbs by a meat hook, beaten, blinded, and ransomed for \$35,000.

When Schultz's operation expanded into Legs Diamond's territory in Manhattan, Diamond's men ambushed Schultz's partner and childhood friend Joey Noe, fatally shooting him. Schultz never found another partner he trusted as he had Noe, and when Diamond had to flee New York a year later to avoid arrest for another murder, Schultz took over his rackets. By the time Diamond had disposed of all the witnesses to the murder, Schultz had the support of the rest of the underworld, including Luciano. Soon Schultz was involved in three gang wars simultaneously -- personal wars with former employer Diamond and former employee Vincent "Mad Dog" Coll, and the Castellammarese War between New York's rival old-style Mafiosi Masseria and Maranzano, and the multi-ethnic "Seven Group" led by Luciano and Meyer Lansky. The Castellammarese War ended in victory for Luciano in 1931; Schultz's gunmen shot Coll in a phone booth in 1932; and Schultz also claimed credit when Diamond was murdered in 1931, describing him as "Just another punk caught with his hands in my pockets."

Stealing from the miserly Schultz was usually fatal. His lawyer once advised, "Don't steal a dollar from his accounts. If you do, you're dead," having seen Schultz shoot underling Jules Martin "just as casually as if he were picking his teeth." Luciano described Schultz as "one of the cheapest guys I ever knew, practically a miser. Here was a guy with a couple of million bucks and he dressed like a pig. He used to brag that he never spent more than thirty-five bucks for a suit, and it hadda have two pairs of pants. His big deal was buyin' a newspaper for two cents so he could read all about himself."

Schultz loved getting good press; he claimed to have changed his name because Flegenheimer was too long to use in a headline, and when reporter Meyer Berger described him as "a pushover for a blonde", Schultz tracked him down and demanded an apology. "What kind of language is that to use in the New York Times?", he roared. Berger apologized, possibly aware that Schultz had once beaten an armed fellow-mobster with a chair for making a joke about a girlfriend.

After Prohibition ended, much of Schultz's wealth came from the numbers racket, which he'd taken over by force in the early 1930s. His accountant, a mathematical genius named Otto "Abbadabba" Berman, worked out a formula for squeezing another \$100,000 a day out of the racket, but had to threaten to leave before Schultz agreed to raise his pay to \$10,000 a week. Schultz's gang also extorted money from restaurateurs and the waiters' union, then paid protection in turn to corrupt Tammany Hall politicians.

A change of government saw Schultz being charged with tax evasion and facing a possible 43-year sentence. In 1934,

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover declared him Public Enemy No. 1. After trying unsuccessfully to bribe an honest cop, Schultz surrendered and spent a few weeks in jail. While out on bail, he murdered Jules Martin, was feted by socialites, talked about converting to Catholicism, and beat the rap.

After Schultz returned to New York, the syndicate leaders hastily gave him back most of his empire. Schultz contented himself with disposing of his top aide, Bo Weinberg, and began plotting to assassinate special prosecutor Thomas E. Dewey. When the syndicate voted against this proposal, Schultz stormed out the meeting angrily vowing to shoot Dewey himself. The syndicate then voted unanimously to have Schultz killed instead, despite Meyer Lansky advising Luciano that "Schultz is your cover. If Dutch is eliminated, you're gonna stand out."

Dutch Schultz was gunned down -- along with Berman and two bodyguards -- in a chop house in Newark on October 23, 1935. He died in hospital two days later. He is thought to have been responsible for 135 deaths.

Encountered

For most of his career, the miserly Schultz took little care to appear as anything other than a thug, preferring intimidation to charm or bribery. His reputation was enough to scare most people, but he was easily angered and often resorted to violence, even in social settings. (In the last two years of his life, he did enjoy a positive reputation among wealthy Connecticut socialites who he tried to charm, rather than intimidate: small group, always recognized). When encountered, Schultz will usually be accompanied by at least one armed bodyguard -- many more if he's expecting trouble (such as a group of armed PCs).

What If?

If Schultz had died at any time before 1935, it probably would have had negligible impact on history: his rackets would have simply been taken over by other mobsters. If he'd survived long enough to assassinate Dewey, however, the changes might be profound; New York would have stayed even more firmly under the syndicate's control, Luciano might never have been arrested and might have become still more powerful, and someone else would have had to run against Harry Truman in 1948.

If Schultz had been convicted of tax evasion charges (either the ones he beat, or the ones still hanging over him when he died) and gone to jail, he might have lived to make some dubious contribution to the war effort in WWII, as Luciano did. Being of German Jewish descent (though he was finally buried in a Catholic cemetery), he might have turned his talents to fighting Hitler, or helping Jews escape from the death camps. In this scenario, the PCs might meet him in jail before the war, or fight alongside him (or against him) in a WWII campaign.

If Berman had survived the gunfight at the chop house, he might have become a notable mathematician or economist, or he might simply have assisted the syndicate in squeezing more money out of gambling rackets.

Dutch Schultz (t/n Arthur Flegenheimer, aka Charles Harmon)

110 points

Born 1902; Died 1935.

Age 31; average build, blue eyes, light brown hair.

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

Secondary Attributes: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 10 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5; Basic Move 5.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Fearlessness/2 [4]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Social Regard (Feared)/4 [20]; Status +1 [free from Wealth]; Wealthy [20].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10]; Bloodlust [-10]; Bully [-10]; Enemies (Rival Gangsters, 6-) [-10]; Greed [-15];

Miserliness [-10]; Reputation 4 (New Yorkers and newspaper readers; large class, sometimes recognized) [-5]; Stubbornness [-5].

For a younger or older Schultz, change his wealth, reputation, and the frequency of appearance of his enemies: this shows him at the peak of his career in 1932-33.

Quirks: Homophobia; Impulsive when drunk; Loves reading his name in the papers (mild Glory Hound disadvantage); Uncongenial; Weakness for blondes. [-5]

Skills: Administration-10 [2]; Area Knowledge (New York)-12 [4]; Brawling-12 [4]; Carpentry-10 [1]; Detect Lies-8 [1]; Driving/TL6 (Car)-10 [2], (Truck)-11 [4]; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-11 [1]; Gambling-9 [1]; Guns/TL6 (Light Automatic)-12 [4], (Pistol)-13 [8], (Shotgun)-12 [4]; Holdout-9 [1]; Interrogation-11 [4]; Intimidation-15 [12]; Knife-11 [2]; Leadership-11 [4]; Merchant-10 [2]; Pickpocket-9 [2]; Professional Skill (Bartender)-10 [2]; Streetwise-14 [16].

Languages: English (native)

Equipment: Auto Pistol, .45 (usually tucked in waistband of trousers); Cheap suit. Sometimes carries SMG, .45; Double Shotgun, 10G; or Light Club.

Bibliography:

- May, Allan. *Dutch Schultz: Beer Baron of the Bronx*.
- Sifakis, Carl. *Encyclopedia of American Crime*.

Pyramid Review

Paranoia XP GM's Screen & Mandatory Fun Enforcement Pack

Published by [Mongoose Publishing](#)

Written by Aaron Allston, Paul Baldowski, Jamie Brewer, Alon Elkin, Beth Fischi, Jeff Groves, Mike Hargreaves, Humza Kazmi, John Kenyon, John Spann, Allen Varney, Wesley Williams, & Paranoia-Live.Net

Forms by Beth Fischi

Layout & editing by Allen Varney

Four-panel b&w/color screen, 24-page booklet; \$14.95

When you're trying to foster a sense of fear and ignorance, ignorance and fear, what will help you in this endeavor most? A wall, of course, a way to keep all your deepest and darkest secrets from prying eyes. Your players know you're not really doing anything by the rolls, but the *Paranoia Gamemaster Screen & Mandatory Fun Enforcement Pack* will keep their accusations of die-fudging to a bare, frightened minimum.

Mongoose Publishing wasted little time getting this gem to market. Treason is everywhere, and the faster the Troubleshooters of Alpha Complex settle into that familiar groove of not knowing what's going on, the sooner they can relax. For a game that emphasizes play over rules, there are certainly plenty of rules filling up the back of the rulebook. If the GM is going to get any use out of them, he'll need this well-aligned quick reference guide to bring order to chaos (and vice versa).

You'll be floored to discover the central two panels are covered with notes on combat and how to damage things. Weapons and armor, damage codes, and hit locations all nestle together nicely. What's the only thing you need as much as combat details? Why, a way to chastise troublesome Troubleshooters, of course. The insubordination chart lists the most common infractions (should you not feel like making up a bogus charge yourself), and if their activities rise to the level of treason, the treason chart sits next to that . . . though of course that takes up an entire panel all by itself. But you knew that.

Of declining usefulness are the left-most panel items: an equipment table, a reward chart (in case you forget which game you're playing), tension levels (how dangerous or well-watched a particular area is), and the cost of backup clones. Still, you have to fill out the dead space somehow.

Another question that comes up when releasing a GM's screen: What do you put on the players' side? The old shield showed what precious few details of character creation The Computer had seen fit to dispense to RED-level operators. All such useful material has been removed. Instead, there are piles of little Computer one-liners lining the surface (like "Exactly what does the reactor core need shielding from?"), certain to keep players entertained -- at least until the GM realizes the group is having more fun reading them than playing his carefully crafted adventure and heats up those treason charts.

And since no one puts one of these things out without an accompanying booklet, it's accompanied by a booklet. An adventure? No, it's many, many adventures. Pages of mission elements allow the referee to make a bunch of die rolls that add up to . . . well, the team still probably won't get out of the briefing room alive, but at least there's a random

chart for where the briefing room is. And the missions aren't just ones assigned by The Computer; it includes your secret society and your service firm's service services.

Then come the forms, many of which are cribbed from old Paranoia sources and updated for a new era. They fall mostly into one of two camps: the before-and-after-action reports, should anyone live to tell how spiffily the mission came off or what happened to all that fancy, experimental, and in all likelihood expensive equipment assigned to the team; and the forms for requesting that you be allowed to off the offending party or parties for their various treasonous lapses.

The last two pages are an uncharacteristically generous cheat sheet telling players what they know about mutations and secret societies depending on the GM's chosen style of play. Players will be in one of two groups. The first has been playing this game for 20 years and knows all this already. The second hasn't acquired quite that tight a grip on events, and might actually find such anxiety adds to the experience. In either case, the crib notes seem like a pretty tame addition.

The booklet is about as good as any other space filler stuffed into one of these things, and the screen isn't fooling around. It's a heavy, high-gloss affair, one of the thickest ever, and it feels like it could deflect incoming small-arms fire (not that this would happen in real-life, but you run the game you're comfortable with). It's still easily folded and unfolded, and fans open neatly starting in the middle and going out in both directions (the old one more or less "rolled up" left to right).

Unless you've got a good head for all this information, or you just make it all up as you go anyway, the useful ***Paranoia Gamemaster Screen & Mandatory Fun Enforcement Pack*** (why not ***Paranoia XP*** specifically?) is going to be a necessary component for anyone plunging headlong into this strange new take on a brave old world.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

anathema: a card game of the Salem Witch Trials

Published by [Advanced Primate Entertainment](#)

Designed by Kevin Brusky with Ray Mulford

Illustrated by Drew Tucker

52-card full color deck & 28-page English/German rulebook; \$11.95

The Salem Witchcraft Trials of the late 17th century have proved a fruitful source for games of all kinds. These include RPG scenarios such as "Wail of the Witch" for *Call of Cthulhu* (published last in *Curse of Cthulhu*); an RPG of its own, *Witch Hunt* published by StatCom Simulations Inc. in 1983; and several card games. One is also called *Witch Hunt*, published by Alien Menace; another is *anathema* from Advanced Primate Entertainment. Yet where *Witch Trial* is a humorous look at the subject, *anathema* is anything but. It also has higher production values.

The first thing that strikes you about *anathema* are the cards. Drew Tucker, giving them upon first glance a suitably somber atmosphere, paints each in rich, dark colors. The deck contains 52 cards, numbered from one to 13 and divided into four suits: Spell, Witch, Village, and Familiar. The cards also contain quotes taken from the Salem Witch Trials as well as facts about the trials and beliefs about witches at the time. These are in themselves interesting, but not pertinent to the game play, intended rather to prompt the player to further investigation -- suggested reading and a website are given in the rulebook. The small rulebook is clearly written and does a much better job of explaining the game than did the one for the publisher's other card game *Big Top: A Card game for aspiring circus owners*. Half of the rulebook is given over to the German version of the rules.

Designed for two to four players, the aim is to capture cards and be the first to score 21 points. It can also be played with four players divided into two teams in the Advanced Game. The Basic Game is based upon the card game *Casino*, with Advanced Game building on that. Neither set of rules is complicated.

After the cards are shuffled, the dealer (determined by whoever cussed or cursed the last, since "anathema" means curse) in turn deals two cards to each player, two face up on the table, and then two to himself. This is repeated until everyone has four cards and the game starts as normal with each participant taking playing down a single card on his turn. Once he has expanded his four cards, the dealer gives everyone four more cards, two at a time. This continues until all 52 cards have been played or captured.

In the Basic Game, a player can conduct a single action out of a choice of three. He can Capture face up cards on the table by matching its value or combined value with a card from his hand. Thus if he has a nine card in his hand, a player could capture any nine-valued card on the table, or cards adding to the value of nine, or both. Should he do the latter, it is possible for a player to sweep the table, and empty it of *all* cards. This is worth more during the scoring. Captured cards are placed in the player's Capture pile, while Sweeps are kept separate.

Alternatively he can Build, adding a card to one of the face up ones and increasing its value. This increased value must be equal to the value of another single card held in his hand. Finally, he can Trail a card. Like Build, this is an option if a player cannot or does not want to Capture. With Trail he simply plays a card from his hand face up on the table.

Once the last card has been played, scoring is done. These are awarded for capturing the most cards, the most cards from the Familiar suit, for each Sweep, and the value of cards without quotes, marked with a large one or two. The

game is repeated until one person scores 21 points and wins.

The Advanced Game adds two rules. The first of these are the Capture Rewards, determined by the suit of the cards. The rewards come into play when a player captures the card marked in the instructions. For example, if he captures the 5 Village suit Swap card, he has the option to swap any face up card on the table with one from his hand. The other two rewards are Peek (for capturing Witch suit cards) which lets a player look at another's hand and Steal (for capturing Spell suit cards) a card from another player's Capture pile. There are no rewards for capturing cards from the Familiar suit.

The second new rule is that players can perform multiple Builds. This is the creation of a Build containing cards that add up to the value of the multiple. Thus for a multiple six Build, all of its cards or combination must be equal to six. Again, a player must have a card in his hand that is equal in value to the multiple. Of course, there is nothing to stop another player from capturing such a Build, just as long as they hold a card equal in value to the multiple. This can be rewarding in team play, as both members work together to score points, which are combined at the end of a round.

There is no denying *anathema* is a decent game in both mechanics and appearance. The information on the cards is also interesting; however, the problem is really that they are a gloss for a set of mechanics. Gamers are likely to want something more -- wanting to explore the subject matter during play, rather than play in spite of or beside it. For this reason, *anathema* isn't a better design than the publisher's other card game, *Big Top: A Card game for aspiring circus owners*; the mechanics and game play are closer to the subject matter of *Big Top* than they are in *anathema*. Where *anathema* rises above *Big Top* is in the simple and well-explained game play. If and when Advanced Primate Entertainment find a middle ground between the two, the resulting card should be something special.

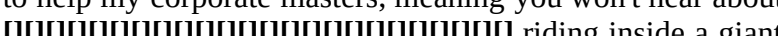
--Matthew Pook

Predictions 2005

Well, my attempts at delaying my annual prediction column until October -- when my odds of being correct are *really* good -- have been stymied by my editorial conscience, which says that all New Year's Columns must be written before the end of January. Also, all Christmas trees must be down before March 15th and stores are not permitted to put up Christmas merchandise any earlier than late August.

Anyway, I confess that this has been a much more difficult column to write than last year. There are two reasons for this. First, I'm coming to realize that the number of "big" happenings in the gaming world are pretty small, so the number of interesting predictions I can make each year is pretty small. Really, it would be a cop-out to copy and paste last year's prediction column here, even though I have reasonable hopes for over half of them.

Far more affecting is the fact that I'm not, really, an outsider anymore. Since my Day Job has changed from selling yo-yos to working for a gaming corporate mastermind, I find I can't approach the prediction biz with the same vigor I did last year. After all, if my Day-Job-self is supposed to think of ideas no one has thought of before and use them to make lots of money, while my columnist-self is supposed to think of ideas no one has thought of before to entertain the readers . . . well, there's an obvious conflict.

Fortunately, this isn't insurmountable. It just means I need to come up with predictions that I'm not planning on using to help my corporate masters, meaning you won't hear about , , or  riding inside a giant robot.

The Definitive FNORD: I suspect that companies, especially those in the upper mid-tier, are going to devote more resources to coming up with the definitive or "ultimate" takes on various subjects or products. This trend started last year; in a cycle where many companies released Pretty Darn Big Dungeon books, AEG released *The World's Biggest Dungeon*. Likewise, White Wolf didn't release simply any old GM screen for its *Vampire: The Requiem* RPG; it released the *ultimate* GM screen, a product capable of stopping bullets. (For those who haven't seen this item, it's a standard GM screen, only printed on beautiful hardcover-book stock. There was none of the usual appended "gamemaster secrets"-type booklet usually used to fill out the product.)

Anyway, I think this trend is going to continue. For one thing, it's another way the mid-level companies are going to differentiate themselves. It doesn't matter if there are a dozen time-travel games on the market; if yours is 800 pages thick, it's probably going to be perceived as the definitive choice for retailers and consumers. (Or, in other words, why would anyone buy a book called, *The World's Second-Largest Dungeon?*)

In addition, these ultimate products are an alternate way to fight retailer, distributor, and consumer resistance to carrying products. While it can be tough to convince a store to stock four \$25 products for a game line, it might be easier to get them to stock one \$100 product comprising the same material.

Origins Awards or GAMA -- Shaken, Not Stirred: Speaking as someone who's won almost as many Origins Awards as I've had years in the industry, I find myself deeply torn regarding these honors. There's an old adage about watching laws and sausage get made that definitely applies to the Origins Awards. While I've always been humbled and supremely pleased to win, I also know that there is a lot of infighting and frustration for all parties involved regarding the Awards process.

Last year also saw GAMA (the Game Manufacturers Association) with turmoil of its own, culminating in the board resignation of [Ryan Dancey](#). It's especially sad given that many industry insiders see GAMA as the closest thing the industry has to a professional organization (although how close it is depends on who is asked). GAMA is also directly tied to the Origins process, meaning that strife for either can affect the other.

As such, I suspect that there might be a major shake-up with either GAMA or the Origins Awards this year. It's one prediction I hope will be wrong, since I feel our small biz can only benefit from a strong, cohesive voice. (As a sub-prediction, I predict that there is a chance for an alternate industry award system to emerge or increase, totally separate

from GAMA; if this award system catches on with fans in any way, it could quite well supplant the Origins.)

Ultra-Snazzy Mega-Limited Bacon-Scented Hand-Sewn Slipcase! I predict that many high-profile products will be released in a limited edition format (in addition to the more common "mass market" edition). In fact, I predict these may reach an epidemic this year; while I don't think the market will fall out for them (I'm saving that one for next year), I think it will be a growing concern both for the industry and its fans as to whether or not to splurge for the \$200 mega-huge edition of a game.

"I still have those toys in my parents' garage!" I predict at least two unlikely licenses that haven't been in the gaming world before; one will be for a "cult"-type property, tapping on a 1970s or 1980s license that people remember with fond nostalgia, and the other will be of the "Oh, wow! That's cool! How did they afford *that* license?!" type. I predict one of these will be an RPG and the other a miniature or other collectible-type game, although I won't venture which is which.

With a Special Section By . . . : I predict that someone will pay for a big-name writer, artist, or personality to be materially tied to a game, beyond the realm of forwards or "supplemental" pieces (such as Neil Gaiman's ***Vampire*** story or Warren Ellis' story for ***Adventure!***). For example, a licensed game might have several of the actors film an in-character scene exclusive for the game, contained in a DVD that's bound within the product.

"Exclusive Video of the Developers Arguing about Reloading Rules": Speaking of which, I expect the DVD format to be much more common this year than any time previously. Someone will figure out that small press-run DVDs permit data or audio/video possibilities not previously possible, and run with it. Whether this means videos of creators (or more small-press movies), extensive backlist DVDs, or something else, I don't know.

And, with that, I fear my crystal ball is going fuzzy for another year. I'll see you all in 50 weeks to let you know how I did. Until then, have fun, support the companies you like, and watch out for giant robots.

--*Steven Marsh*

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Demented and Sad, But Social: Social Characters for Antisocial Players

Part I

by Matt Riggsby

Your character: a poor fighter and indifferent scholar, but a snappy dresser, sharp wit, sly con man, friend to all, and terror of the appropriate gender, who can talk anybody into anything. The problem? You, the player, may be physically fit and intellectually formidable, but you still can't get a date and paid twice as much for your car as everybody else. A long-running problem with RPGs is that players sometimes want to play characters who are more articulate and socially capable than they are themselves. Playing a taciturn warrior or technician is relatively easy. Most games have extensive rules to deal with their relatively mechanical activities, but characters whose emphasis is on talking to people must rely on their own talking-to-people skills, which are often, alas, lacking, making it a fundamental challenge of roleplaying. This article provides advice (taken from real-world sources) for players who are considering social characters but feel limited by their own lack of social skills. With this, you can use your socially-oriented character to *get things done*, making him as effective as his heavily armed but less talkative companions.

Being Social

Why play a socially-oriented character? Admittedly, if you're braving the forces of nature or fighting mindless automatons, there's not much point. However, if you're facing intelligent opposition, you can be as effective as anybody else, if not more so. The thing to remember is this: prospective opponents will present no more resistance than they *want* to. As a social character, you can change what your opponents want. Instead of fighting the Black Knight, you can appeal to his sense of honor to let you pass. Instead of breaking into the top-secret research facility, you can convince somebody who works there to give you the access codes or, better yet, bring out the data you need.

A good way to approach playing a social character is thinking in terms of relationships. Relationships are to social characters what weapons are to combat monsters, wands and crystal balls are to wizards, and so on. People are your equipment, and they're more effective if you practice with them (charming people instantly is the realm of "cinematic" social interaction or great good luck; we'll be concentrating on getting things done by making contacts and building trust). A social character will spend time . . . well, being social: drinking with acquaintances, attending weddings and funerals, going to parties, lending a sympathetic ear to others' problems, and generally being a good or useful friend. You'll create alliances and contacts which you can take advantage of later. Think of it as building up a reservoir of trust and good will. Once you do start making unusual or extreme requests ("Say, could you pick up a kilo of highly-illegal joydust on the way home?"), your contacts be more likely to grant them.

Starting Relationships

One common problem is knowing where to start. How do you meet people? How do you build and maintain relationships? In part, this depends on where adventures are taking place. For social characters, it's usually important to establish your backstory. If you're starting out in your home territory, it's entirely reasonable for you to start with some knowledge of the people around you, even if it's only a "common knowledge" understanding. Workplaces, churches, neighborhoods, clubs and professional organizations, and other fixtures of everyday life may give you a ready-made social network. And even if they aren't particularly friendly to you, you should at least have some idea of how to approach prominent people.

But what about the more common wandering adventurer? How does a socially-oriented character establish himself in new surroundings? One thing to do is to take advantage of common backgrounds. A traveler could look for a

community of co-religionists or fellow expatriots. Minorities who share a language or religion may be happy to find a new fellow, or at least feel obligated to at least have a polite conversation with him.

If your character can't draw on existing ties, there are a few social activities which can be found just about anywhere that will give your character an opportunity to start interacting with the locals. The obvious one is drinking. Bars and taverns are centers of social activity where it's easy for one stranger to strike up a conversation with another. Tea, coffee, chocolate, or electrical brain stimulation may replace alcohol, but the function remains the same. Some establishments may have a clannish clientele, so you may have to try out a few before you find someone willing to speak to you.

Gambling is another way to meet people. Most casual gamblers will allow a stranger to join the competition if he's got money. However, if you're a better gambler than your new acquaintances, you may intentionally lose so as not to cause resentment. Certain artistic activities can be social as well. Although professional entertainers are on the low end of the social scale in many cultures, dancing, singing, and storytelling, skillfully done in a purely social context, can garner enough favorable attention to get you started.

Here are some other tips on meeting and getting along with others:

- Cultivate the ability to talk about nothing. Weather is a universally safe subject, although both you and the GM may be forgiven for hand-waving everything past "Pretty warm for this time of year, isn't it?"
- Gossip is useful, even if it isn't true. Telling stories about shared acquaintances is a remarkably common activity. Listening to someone prattle on about what Lord So-and-so did with Lady Such-and-such may not give you anything useful, but it will make you appear interested in the person talking to you. Likewise, repeating gossip yourself makes it look like you trust the person you're talking to. Just eavesdropping on others' gossip will give you some idea of who people know.
- Appearance counts. If you look like a dangerous goon, people will treat you like a dangerous goon. Usually, that means they'll be polite and will get away from you as soon as possible (or have their own dangerous goons move you away). As in real life, characters who want to impress others should dress nicely, shave or not as is appropriate, and so on. An important implication for characters in RPGs is that armor and most weapons simply aren't worn openly on a day to day basis (small knives and decorative swords are acceptable in *some* but certainly not most societies). People who do wear them are either soldiers on duty or just looking for trouble. Unless you're trying to provide some immediate, personal intimidation or are dealing with other armed men, leave all of your visible arms and armor at home.
- Don't just walk up to someone and start talking to him. Find a pretext, however minor, such as asking directions or wondering where that lovely hat came from because you want to get one like it for your sister.
- Do *not* open a conversation by soliciting military weapons, requesting the phone number of the best assassin in the city, or asking a woman of unknown repute what her price is. Criminal acts and other socially unsanctioned behavior are not things to be discussed with strangers.
- Don't spend too long with any one person, particularly someone you've just met. Too much attention may make them uncomfortable and it will certainly give you too much of a chance to say something wrong. End a conversation while it's still going well (there's always a pretext -- I can't be late to work, I have to greet my other party guests, I'm meeting my church group, etc.) and leave them, as it were, wanting more.
- Don't spend too much time talking about yourself, and keep conversation focused on the other person as much as possible. People will be more interested in talking to you if they're dealing with subjects they're interested in themselves, rather than you and your concerns, which may be alien to them. And when you talk to people repeatedly, remember as much as you can about them: birthdays, relatives, medical complaints, hobbies, and so on. If you bring these things up later ("So what did you do for your wife's birthday last week?"), you'll sound interested in that person, making you more interesting. Keep notes if you have to (writing them down after the fact, though; constantly jotting things down during a conversation gets a little creepy); salesmen, politicians, and others whose careers depend on maintaining relationships often keep files of this kind of trivial personal information on their important contacts.

Social Climbing

Cultural Differences

Many social characters don't just want to make friends. They want friends in high places. Although it's tempting to cut out the middleman and go straight to the top, it's generally a bad idea to appeal directly to emperors, CEOs, and other supremely powerful individuals. Powerful people are already very busy and have a horde of other people, who are probably just as charming as you, trying to get their attention. To reach these people, you'll have to insinuate yourself into the circles in which they move.

The general technique is to interest someone who is closer to your ultimate target than you are. You may do this by providing useful services, a source of income, or simply entertaining conversation. Once you've established a relationship with that person, you can prevail on your new friend to introduce you to people he knows, or at least use that relationship as a pretext to introduce yourself to others ("Didn't we meet at Lord So-and-so's ball last week?") and establish relationships with them as well. Depending on the social difference between you and the person you want to get close to, this can take a lot of time and effort and can turn into a "six degrees of separation" game ("Your friend the constable is the royal tinsmith's assistant's cousin, who works for the royal tinsmith, who gets commissions from the third lord of the exchequer, who works for the keeper of the purse, who reports to the king. It's foolproof!").

As if that weren't hard enough, you'll have competition. You're not the only social climber, so you may be working at cross-purposes with others, or at least competing for your target's limited time. You'll have to defend yourself from subtle social attacks intended to alienate you from your powerful friends and may need to launch a few of your own. This kind of nonviolent warfare can actually be a lot of fun if you're creative about it. The goal is not to kill your enemies, but simply to distract and embarrass them. Forge love letters to get them entangled in scandalous affairs, then expose them. Get their tailor drunk and weaken the seams on their ball gown so that it will rip and fall off should the train get caught on something. Spread appalling rumors about them; a good way to start one is to claim to have heard it from somebody else and vehemently deny it.

It is also a good idea to make friends with a number of people in new social circles you enter, not just individual rungs up the ladder. You may want to moderate your rate of climb as well. New favorites are also rarely popular with old hangers-on, and if you rise too fast, you may find yourself a target as well.

If you're pressed for time, there are some shortcuts. If you're very charming and very fortunate, even the briefest direct contact with your target can suffice to get them interested. Some campaign styles will permit and even encourage this; it worked for Cinderella. It can happen in realistic settings as well, but this kind of love-at-first-sight may only last until the target sees somebody else. Great personal achievements can lead to brief meetings with powerful figures handing out honors. If you're not hero material, you can capitalize on the successes of the hero-types in your group.

Failing that, the rich and powerful in some societies are expected to allow time for strangers to approach them. Roman patricians kept their doors open so that tradesmen could come in and offer their services. Rulers through history would periodically hold audiences where anyone (theoretically) could petition them for aid and relief, although just getting in the door might require conniving

A huge factor complicating all of this is cultural differences. What one society regards as normal and polite, another may regard as outrageously offensive, or at best incomprehensible. A punch in the head will get you arrested in our society, but it might be a casual greeting among Klingons or orcs. Consequently, just about every principle stated in this article will have at least one exception somewhere. For example, there's a caution later on about offering blatantly unrealistic prices for goods when haggling. In some cultures, it's not just accepted, it's *expected*. An English gem merchant visiting Persia in the 17th century complained about having a hard time selling his wares because he didn't initially overinflate his prices, as was the custom there. So when you encounter a new society, it's a very good idea to sit back and watch for a while. Observe how people interact with each other, how they dress, how men speak to women, how young people greet elders, how the poor deal with the rich, whether or not they make physical contact (shaking hands, hugging or kissing, etc.), and so on. And when you do start dealing with people, start with those who, as much as possible, match your own age, sex, and apparent station in life. And don't discount the value of interfering old busybodies. A peevish old man scolding you for being a foreign devil might be annoying and offensive, but he'll also give you some useful (if exaggerated) ideas about local social norms.

your way past guards doing crowd control, minor bureaucrats, and other petitioners. Powerful people in more democratic societies may make a point of appearing in public to appear more common; Cosimo de Medici, the Florentine political strongman, regularly strolled around the marketplaces in order to demonstrate that he was just another citizen. It then becomes a question of being in the right place at the right time.

One charming device used by many past societies, where communications were slow, was the letter of introduction. Such letters took the place of an in-person introduction if the author and recipient (or recipients; letters could be "to whom it may concern" and shown to many people) were far apart. One person would write a letter to a distant friend, relative, or colleague, describing the bearer and asking for his aid. The person for whom the letter was written could present himself to a recipient and be as far ahead as if he had been introduced in person. Or not, depending on the tone of the letter. Obviously, forged letters of introduction could be a PC's best friend.

Haggling

Buying things may itself be a social activity. For most of history, and in many places in the modern world, purchases are accompanied by negotiation. The idea of a fixed price for goods is relatively recent, and even now it doesn't apply to everything. Large purchases, such as vehicles and real estate, and many salaries are still subject to haggling in the western world, and in less developed regions, haggling still the standard rather than the exception. While it may not accompany all transactions (if the innkeeper says it's a copper for a pint of beer, it's a copper for a pint of beer), it's acceptable, even expected, for any transaction where the goods in question aren't necessarily identical. For example, produce and livestock will have individual flaws and merits, and so should be bought after haggling.

In theory, the process is simple. One person suggests a price for merchandise, the other makes a counteroffer, and so on until one or the other gives up or completes the purchase. In practice, this is a contest of endurance as much as it is persuasive skill. A successful haggler is usually just one who keeps at it but does so in a way that doesn't alienate potential buyers and sellers. Some tips:

Don't be silly when you make an initial offer. Most games have extensive equipment lists providing prices for common goods. Those lists are a good starting point. Unless the customer doesn't know anything about local prices or the item is of unusually high or low quality, going for a price more than 100% higher or 50% lower than list price is probably unreasonable. If you make an absurd initial offer or start making additional offers which move away from rather than closer to the counter-offer, the seller is likely to tell you to get lost so he can work with more reasonable customers. (And don't expect the final price to be exactly half-way between the initial offer and counter-offer.) There are a few exceptions, of course. Initial asking prices can be absurdly inflated where two different economies meet. For example, tourist markets sell based on what the wealthy tourists can pay, not on what it costs the poor manufacturers.

If you're selling, praise your wares' quality over similar goods sold by your competitors and allude to the high cost of producing it or obtaining it. A smart salesman will try to figure out his customers' individual needs and point out how his goods are suited to them ("This 10-foot pole is made from stronger wood than those others. It won't snap if a trap door closes on it!").

If you're buying, it's okay to point out flaws as justification for a lower price, but stop short of insulting the merchandise. It's impolite and can alienate the seller, which you want to avoid. If you spot a flaw, you may want to work the price down a bit and *then*, after the seller has made his "best case" for the quality of his merchandise, point out the flaw to force the price down farther still.

Cinematic Haggling

Fiction is full of spirited bargaining with both sides stating things in the most extreme forms possible. A seller will weep at the price he's offering but he must accept it in order to feed his ten starving children, while a buyer may counter with a lower price because the seller reminds him of his second cousin, or some such. In real life, this doesn't happen terribly often; mild whining and cajoling is the norm. However, despite the questionable realism, it's a lot more fun. If your GM is willing to get into the spirit of things, by all means call on the spirits of your ancestors to witness your foolishness at accepting such an unreasonable price.

When you hit a price that the other person is willing to accept, there may be unconscious physical cues ("tells," in gambling parlance): a slight hesitation, leaning forward interestedly, etc. If you can spot that reaction, you'll know that you're in the right ballpark even if the other person doesn't accept your offer right away. This may be sufficiently subtle that your GM will make it subject to rolls against perception abilities or bargaining skills.

If you get a good price on an item, it's usually polite to give a little on the next one. That may not matter if you'll never buy anything from this person again, but it's a very good idea if you want to establish an ongoing working relationship.

Friends get better prices than strangers. It's to your advantage to establish long-term business relationships for that reason. Remember, though, that friends may expect you to give them better prices than you offer to strangers, and your relationship may be complicated if either of you is too greedy and tries to take advantage of the situation regularly.

Knowing the merchandise and the market is key to getting a good price. If you can't tell an old horse from a young one, don't know the difference between a car's dealer invoice price and sticker price, or aren't aware of special taxes (or lack thereof) on the goods you want to buy, the seller is in a better position to defend a price that's favorable to him or sell you goods of lesser quality.

Con Games

The dark cousin of commerce is fraud, scams, and con games. Forget *The Sting*. Being a con man is a rather dismal business, which consists mostly of finding someone gullible (the "mark," in American slang) and lying ruthlessly. Con games follow a similar pattern: Get someone to trust you, have them put money or goods in a place where you can get them, take them, and run. The key task for the social character is to build the trust that will allow you to make the rest happen. These are some essential tools the con man can use to build trust (or at least stave off mistrust):

- **Appeal to greed:** You don't necessarily have to make your mark trust you absolutely. Indeed, many victims of cons have reported ongoing feelings of unease. You just have to get him to trust you enough that his expectation of benefit to himself outweighs any distrust he may have. If the mark thinks there's at least a chance of making a large profit, there's a better chance that he'll go along.
- **Time pressure:** Most people realize that something that sounds too good to be true probably is, so offers from con men don't hold up well to scrutiny. The guiding principle for con men is to keep the mark from thinking about it, usually by not giving him enough time to do so.
- **Material evidence:** Promises are all well and good, but they're not nearly so convincing as a physical demonstration of what the mark stands to gain. This may be a display of cash and goods, or making yourself appear to be as prosperous as you claim you can make your mark (for example, temporarily setting up a well-furnished office to do business in).
- **Third party assurances:** The mark is more likely to trust you if someone else can verify at least part of your story. This may require you to steer your mark towards an allegedly unrelated third party or to fabricate evidence that a truly neutral third party will find.

Ideally, the con man will subject his mark to a brief hard sell, not giving him a lot of time to think about it or confirm your story. For example, someone might approach soldiers in a war zone with a painting or piece of jewelry. He'll claim that he's a refugee and is willing to sell a family heirloom to raise money. The soldiers have little time to make a choice (the seller has to move on quickly to avoid the fighting) and little information (few front-line units have art historians or jewelers on staff), and the seller's story is at least plausible, so the soldiers' greed may come to outweigh their doubts. Selling fakes like this won't work every time, but it'll work often enough that a con man with access to old-looking trinkets or a partner capable of producing old-looking paintings could make quite a lot of money.

In most cases, though, it's difficult to get someone to trust you enough to hand over anything of significant value, so you'll have to take steps to keep the mark interested. One way of doing this is to get the mark interested in something that looks profitable and only getting him to put up some money later in the process. One such con is to "find," in conjunction with a chosen mark, an item of apparent value, such as a gold watch. The con man, out of a feigned sense of

Taking the Money and Running

In terms of measurable skills

fairness, will accept that since he and the mark found it together they share ownership as well. He will then, on consulting with an expert (a compatriot posing as a lawyer or policeman who happens to be passing by or perhaps just a randomly-dialed phone number), discover that the find must be registered for a fee with proper authorities to establish legal ownership. This may introduce an element of time pressure: the find must be registered within a certain time frame or the item must be given up. Even if it doesn't, the con man will request half of the fee from the mark but let him keep the valuable item as security (or he may suggest doing it the other way around, relying on the mark to distrust him enough to not want the item out of his sight). The mark is already expecting some profit from finding the item and is therefore more likely to try to overcome complications than if they had been apparent at the beginning. With money in hand, the con man will vanish, leaving the mark with a worthless object.

Some may recognize this pattern as similar to the "Nigerian" scam, practiced widely by email but sometimes by mail as well: An "official" of a foreign government, in an attempt to shelter millions of dollars of his country's money against vicious rebels, attempts to enlist the aid of a foreigner who can more easily deal with his own nation's more secure banks. In return, he can keep a share of the money. If the mark agrees, the official tells him that all he needs to do is open an account in the names of both the mark and the official with a certain minimum balance and send the account information back so that money can be deposited . . .

Of course, con men don't actually have to work with nothing. It only becomes a con when the con man doesn't intend to give up what he's "selling." In the gold watch scam, a particularly dexterous con man may use a real gold watch which will stand up to some scrutiny (if, for example, the mark happens to know something about watches) and use sleight of hand to retrieve it and replace it with a cheap replica at the last minute. This sort of bait-and-switch is easier if the valuable object is in a plain cover: wrapped in a handkerchief, sealed in an envelope, held in a small cardboard box, etc. All the con man needs to switch is one nondescript package for another rather than a valuable object and a convincing replica. Using an item of real value makes the social part of the con a bit easier, but requires unrelated physical skills (switching two identical objects unseen) and risks (the chance that the mark will see you making the switch).

Since it's difficult to get someone to give up thousands of dollars on your word alone, some sort of physical proof and third-party assurances are important to many high-priced scams. Unscrupulous contractors might start out using expensive materials and skilled labor but then, once they've got a few customers to point to for references, switch to using shoddy materials and unskilled workers, taking all the profits they can until the authorities move in. Pyramid schemes, fraudulent investment schemes where money from new investors is paid under the guise of profits to earlier ones (with administrators raking in a percentage), can also point to satisfied customers until the volume of new investments falls below the level needed to sustain payments to older investors. Most cons at this level must necessarily operate, at least partly and temporarily, as if they were legitimate businesses. Unlike the romanticized fiction of a con man making a single big score, really profitable cons tend to operate by building up an aura of respectability then taking as much money from as many different people as they can until legal pressure builds to an point of arrest.

and abilities, a con man PC doesn't need much more than the abilities of a successful salesman, perhaps with a little added charisma. The most important abilities he needs are rarely represented on a character sheet: an ability to lie consistently and unflinchingly, a sense of timing that tells him when it's time to go, and the good sense to stay well away from people he has conned. Many con men are caught because they stay in one place long enough for the police to catch up with them or someone they've cheated to get revenge. Cheating someone will generally burn through any good will you've accumulated and then some, which is going to seriously impair your ability to talk them into anything else.

Pyramid Review

Code of Unaris RPG

Published by [Goldleaf Games LLC](#)

Written by Gary Pratt

Cover by Eric Lofgren

Illustrated by Sedone Thongvilay, Derek Fridolfs, Peter Martin, Ray Dillon, Roxell Karr, & Socar Myles

Cartography by Eric Hotz & Daniel Schenstrom

318-page Perfect Bound Book; \$15.95

Code of Unaris is different in two ways. First is its size. At 4½ by 6½-inches it is one of the smallest of RPG books since the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 1st Edition* reprints. Second, as an RPG, it is not intended for tabletop play, but for online play. Unlike other RPGs designed for that purpose, *Code of Unaris* is not played on dedicated servers or software. Rather it uses online chat software as its platform, such as MSN Messenger or ICQ, meaning that it can be played by a widely dispersed group of players rather than one sat around a table in a living room.

The fact that *Code of Unaris* is played in chat rooms is integral to the setting. Unaris began as an online computer sim, like a MUD or MUSH, powered by a master AI and set on the world of Unaris, the name of the Earth's moon over a billion years ago. Its setting is the Sunset Kingdoms, during the high fantasy golden age of Unaris' Third Age. In reality, the program running *Code of Unaris* is not creating a game, but a wormhole back into humanity's long distant past! At the other end of the wormhole, an ancient immortal known as the Winter Warlock discovers the existence of the wormhole and realizes that mankind at least survived his plans to destroy Unaris. Despite the best efforts of games' designers, they could not close the wormhole and somehow the Winter Warlock escaped.

Suddenly the inhabitants of Unaris were faced by an onset of a malevolent ice age. As temperatures plummeted and glaciers spread over the sunset kingdoms, magicians worked to enact the last great creation of the Third Age. The Alfar Tower, 50 miles square and 100 tall, is civilization's last refuge, consisting of 20 levels that will each become home to a different kingdom and people from the world outside. As Unaris enters its Fourth Age, magic weakens, and the denizens of the Alfar Tower try to live as before, conducting trade and preserving knowledge of the Third Age as best they can. Meanwhile, the Winter Warlock and his multitudinous minions camp outside, campaigning to break through the tower's unnaturally tough stone walls. Some have managed to creep in, but are now trapped, working to undermine the surviving societies inside the tower. This is eased by an earthquake that rocked the tower, collapsing tunnels and blocking access between the levels and to the Great Stair that runs from top to bottom.

The two ages are the initial settings for playing *Code of Unaris*. The first is the Third Age, a rich feudal setting in on the verge of a renaissance. It is also advanced in the science of mathematics, but this has been outlawed after the formula for time travel was discovered. The second is the Fourth Age, 5,000 years later, set inside Alfar Tower and is more post-apocalyptic in nature as everyone strives to survive and rebuild once again to face threats unknown. Eventually, if a PC Mathematician can advance his knowledge of time-travel algorithms (as measured by his Calculate skill) he can travel to any period in Unaris' history. Initially he is only able to travel between the two dates in the Third and Fourth Ages.

Reflecting the fact that ***Code of Unaris*** is played online, characters are simply defined. A character has 22 common skills (such as fight, scrounge, and swim) rated at 3, and several learned skills rated at 5. These reflect a character's occupation, such as Cast (to cast spells), Heal, and, Investigate. The creation process again is simple; a player selects one of 20 templates and modifies it with six bonus points. These can be spent on skills or buying a single special ability, for example, Danger Sense or Technical Brilliance. The former gives a +2 bonus to all dodge attempts while the latter gives a +1 bonus to the fight skill. A single piece of equipment and a reputation, both of which again give a +1 bonus, finish the creation process.

Similarly the mechanics are simple. They are also diceless. To attempt an action, a player matches the appropriate skill, plus any bonuses from the situation, equipment, and special abilities against a target number set by the GM. If it exceeds the target number, the action is successful, if not, it fails. But through clever roleplaying, determining new information about an obstacle or problem, or using the correct tool, a +1 bonus can be gained which will turn a tied score (between skill and target number) into a successful action.

Combat works in a similar fashion, though with a slightly more detailed set of bonuses and penalties. Damage is equal to the amount that a combatant exceeds an opponents fight skill, modified by the damage bonus of the weaponry involved. All characters have ten points of health. Two or three blows from a sword will be enough to kill you.

Spell use is little different to this, and essentially spells can be cast by Magicians, Engineers, and Mathematicians. Where the first employs knowledge of rituals to cast, the latter two use their knowledge of science and mathematical formulae to achieve similar effects. Magic users use the Cast skill, engineers the Engineer skill, and mathematicians the Calculate skill. Some spells have been outlawed, so players will need the Forbidden Knowledge skill to learn them. Although players have plenty of spells to choose from, such as the evocatively named "Cissaro's Gravitational Manipulation" and "Rain of Fiery Doom," characters can only cast a number of spells equal to their skills.

Where ***Code of Unaris*** deviates from this simplicity is in the application of what it calls Hacks, or Story Hacks. A player starts with 20 of these and uses them to alter the in-game reality. He expends a hack to change something typed out by the GM, a word or an amount, thus:

GM: It was a dark and stormy night.

Player: Hack for a point. It was a dark and starry night.

Or

GM: Suddenly six Freyan Ice Gnomes leap down on you!

Player: Two-point hack. Make the six a two.

There are some limitations to using hacks. Some words are illegal, usually critical to the story or the setting. Further there is an in-game danger also. Hack too often and you come to the attention the Winter Warlock, who unleashes a Watch Demon upon you.

Almost two thirds of the little book is given to the setting, evenly divided between the two time periods. This includes the history, the places, the peoples, the creatures, and the organizations, many of which are nicely illustrated. The artwork is quirky, particularly the maps of the Alfar Tower. Another quirk is the color; the book is not in black and white, but pine and white!

What ***Code of Unaris*** does not include is a scenario, and intentionally so. To support ***Code of Unaris***' on-line play, its scenarios also come in electronic format. This allows the GM to copy and paste text straight into the chat window instead of typing the descriptions out. The first scenario is available to download from the publisher's website.

Part of the conceit of ***Code of Unaris*** is that players are meant to be playing themselves playing an online MUD or MUSH. This is inferred in the inclusion of the user details of many of Unaris' major NPCs. These are perhaps a little cheesy, the inference being that two US politicians play on a regular basis -- one with a thick European accent and another, having retired four years ago. Also inferred is the fact that Unaris is the ultimate mythic age, the one from

which humanity has drawn many of its names and legends.

As a chat rather than a tabletop RPG, ***Code of Unaris*** is a lighter affair. It is also a remote affair, players being present just in the chat window, so a game will take more dedication than a normal tabletop RPG. The light and diceless system makes ***Code of Unaris*** more of a storytelling game than a mechanistic game. The advice on chat play includes a handy guide to the lingo and simple advice. It suggests keeping a word document open to record notable dialog and the like. That said, ***Code of Unaris*** could be run as a tabletop RPG, preferably using a simple system.

Originally submitted as part of Wizards of the Coast's ***d20 System*** campaign contest, ***Code of Unaris*** is the third of the entries to see publication. As a storytelling game, this version is the ***d20 System's*** antonym, and proof that its setting is not dependent on mechanics. That said, the mechanics may be too simplistic for some and the concept of hacks too clumsy for others. But the setting remains both rich and interesting in itself, and the idea of being specifically designed to be played online in chat rooms is also novel.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

All Wound Up! Escape from the Cemetery

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Concept, design by Kerry Breitenstein & Todd A. Breitenstein

Art by Dave Aikins

Edited by Patrick Kapera & Patrick Phalen

Layout, design by Todd A. Breitenstein

boxed set with 60 cards, four windup pawns, four full-color double-sided tiles, 25 brain counters (five each of five colors), four start tokens, dealer token, and b&w rulebook; \$34.99

In their endeavor to innovate, Twilight Creations, Inc. is changing how you think about pawns. Their latest, ***All Wound Up! Escape from the Cemetery***, uses windup toys as the playing pieces, so you don't even have to move them yourself. Just set them loose . . .

The players are all dead, and to pass the time they're racing around their bone yard using their adorable clockwork ghouls. The object of the game is to be the first one to complete the circuit and reach the cemetery gate.

Players agree on a layout for the boards, which determines how the race runs. The four sections could be placed in a square to make a circle of sorts; the gate side could be placed outward so the pieces have to curve to the side once they've completed a circuit; they could be arranged in a straight line; and so on. No one places their pawn until they get to take a card action, though, and to take an action you have to "win" it by bidding cards.

Everyone gets a hand of 10 cards, and the first player passes several of his to the person on his left. That person selects the same number of cards (from his hand and those passed to him) to pass to his left, and this goes around until the first person gets the cards back. Then the process repeats, using one less card each time, until finally everyone trades one last card. You want to develop a hand that lets you win the move you want.

The cards determine how you maneuver (similar to ***RoboRally***). The Left cards let you turn your figure up to 180 degrees along the left arc, Right cards along the right. Some cards rotate enemies in unfavorable directions. To get anywhere, though, you need Wind cards (wind as in "turn," not "breeze"). Numbered one through four, these cards let you turn the key on your windup pawn that many times. Whoever bids the most of one kind of card (and Wild cards) places his pawn on the board and takes that action. Bidding continues for the various moves until everyone is out of cards, then hands are replenished to 10.

The finish line isn't the only thing you can cross. A few obstacles like open graves can hamper your movement or send you back. Brains lie all about the graveyard, and if you pass over one you get a black brain. This may be turned in during your move to wind your toy one rotation less -- if, say, Wind 4 was the only bid you could win and you're too close to the edge of the playing surface, the brain comes in handy. Each time you roll over another brain, you have a choice: get another black brain, or turn in a black brain for an "upgrade." These other colored brains provide more effects, such as altering your move, stealing cards, or improving your bid.

The boards are the graphic centerpiece for the game, and they're all rendered in glorious full color. The art is bright (insofar as a cemetery is "bright") and the design avoids a cluttered look so it's both easy to play on and easy on the eyes. The rule book is an oversized item (as big as the box the game comes in), so space isn't an issue.

The rules readily admit that there's a lot of room for error here. You're using unstable little windup toys as your pawns, and arguments could easily arise as they totter uncertainly about the boards, so make sure yours is a reasonably patient group. A few rule omissions will chafe -- since you must play "all of one kind of card," does that mean all Wind cards are the same, or are Wind 1s and 2s distinct? But the big question is: How resilient are these little novelties with their moving parts? Perhaps Twilight Creations, Inc. will sell more of these gewgaws separately as they do with ***Bag O' Zombies***, because as tough as they look, all those gears might spell trouble down the road (they're already offering to replace them by mail and at conventions).

In many ways, the game seems like more trouble than it's worth. The card deals and trades are a long way to go for a game mechanic, though that's balanced by length of play. You're really not traveling that far, so unlike ***RoboRally*** you won't be reshuffling dozens of times. There's no denying the game has an utterly delightful concept and construction, and players of all ages will find it irresistible in spite of its potential flaws. It's great for getting the family around the gaming table, and debates notwithstanding it's a fun and original way to unwind.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Monster Manual III (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by Wizards of the Coast

224-page four-color hardcover; \$34.95

It would be easy to be skeptical about the *Monster Manual III*. After all, this is yet another creature collection from the same group that have already produced a *Monster Manual*, *Monster Manual II*, *Fiend Folio*, *Monsters of Faerun*, and a few hundred thousand additional creature collections. How much different or better could this one be? Wouldn't it simply contain the rejects not included in previous efforts? Are they dipping into the same well too many times?

Well, yes and no. The *Monster Manual III* suffers from exactly the same problems that any added-on creature collection always suffer from. Many of the monsters are derivative or simply variations on pre-existing creatures. Additionally, there is the problem of springing these monsters into campaigns that have existed for months or years without them. Many creatures have a back story already added for them, allowing for as seamless of an addition to an ongoing campaign as possible, and virtually every creature lists where it frequently occurs in the Wizard's campaign settings of Faerun and Eberron, nice additions for players in those worlds. As is normal with Wizards of the Coast books, the art is routinely excellent, and the pages are well laid out and easy to follow.

There is a larger, deeper problem here, though. Many of the creatures listed in the *Monster Manual III* seem to suffer from having been poorly designed, poorly thought through, poorly edited, or a combination of these. Three monsters jump out as examples of these problems.

The first is the glaistig, a vampiric fey creature that lives in lakes, ponds, and rivers. Included in the description of this creature is the notation that it cannot move more than 300 yards away from its particular body of water. Should it do so, the glaistig begins suffering the effects of drowning. The problem here is that this creature is listed as a potential character race for players interested in more unusual characters or obtaining unique cohorts. What good is a character that can't travel anywhere in a game in which the central conceit includes traveling all over the world and, potentially, to other planes of existence? Either the creator or the editor missed this simple fact.

Second is the plague spewer, a large undead creature that, as its name suggests, creates plagues wherever it goes. While this is a nice idea, the creature is defined as being mindless, just like a skeleton or zombie. And yet, the creature is "always neutral evil." So, while the creature is incapable of thinking, it appears to be capable of generating willful evil. Again, either poorly planned or poorly edited.

The third, and most egregious example of the problems with this book is the voidmind template. The basic idea for the template is fascinating: mind flayers devour most (but not all) of a creature's brain and fill the empty cranial space with a greenish goo. This goo allows the creature to think and act on its own, but leaves the mind flayers in control. The four holes the mind flayer used to drag out the creature's brain are filled in, allowing the voidmind creature to infiltrate and spy on its former friends and allies. If it takes care, the creature is difficult to detect. This is all well and good, save for the fact that the voidmind creature also has *a gigantic green tentacle sprouting from its forehead!* So, they both make excellent, difficult to detect spies, and they have a giant green tentacle, which doesn't appear to be retractable, or even truly under the creature's control. There's simply no explanation for the obvious clash here.

Minor problems plague many of the other creatures in the book. The astral stalker has an attack called a "throat dart," but it is never explained if that attack is launched from the creature's throat or strikes the throat of the victim. Chraals are created when evil people die on the Elemental Plane of Air or Water, but are not considered undead; meanwhile, dust wights, which are a combination of negative energy and the Elemental Plane of Earth (and don't require anyone's

restless spirit), *are* undead. Charnel hounds are another "always evil" undead with no Intelligence score.

There are some bright spots. Most exciting for the player is the inclusion of five possible character races with no level adjustment, and another half dozen with an ECL of five or less, making for some potentially interesting character ideas. For the DM, there are several dozen creatures that make for exciting one-time encounters and perhaps another dozen more that can have an entire campaign built around them.

As expected, though, the bulk of the creatures fall somewhere in between the two extremes. Many are simply variations on existing races or ideas that have been used in one place and have been morphed to a different environment, different alignment, or different creature type.

Ultimately, the ***Monster Manual III*** is a hit-or-miss book with marginally more hits than misses. It offers very little for anyone not already running or planning to run a ***Dungeons & Dragons*** fantasy campaign, and in truth, only the true die-hard ***Dungeons & Dragons*** players will want it or find enough in it to warrant the price tag.

--Steve Honeywell

Oh No He Didn't: Dick Whittington And His Cat

"[A]t last the poor boy determined to run away from his place . . . very early in the morning on All-Hallows Day. He traveled as far as Holloway, and there sat down on a stone to consider what course he should take; but while he was thus ruminating, Bow bells . . . began to ring; and he thought their sounds addressed him in this manner:

'Turn again, Whittington

Thrice Lord Mayor of London'."

-- Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book*

Once upon a time, a poor boy named Dick Whittington left home to seek his fortune in the great city of London. He nearly starved to death before he found work of the most menial kind in the home of Mr. FitzWarren, a merchant. With the tiny amount of money he saved, he bought a cat, for companionship and to kill the rats in his garret, but harsh usage still discouraged him and he resolved to leave the city forever. But on Highgate Hill, on the way out of London with his cat, he heard the Bow bells ring out the words "Turn again, Whittington. Thrice Lord Mayor of London." He turned around and went back to the FitzWarren establishment.

When he returned, Mr. FitzWarren was outfitting a trading ship to Barbary. It was his practice that all in his employ could send something along on the voyage to invest or trade, but Dick only had his cat. "Fetch thy cat, boy, and send her," said FitzWarren, so Dick did so. In the kingdom where the ship landed, cats were unknown, and mice and rats overran the King's palace. When Dick's cat killed all the mice in the palace, the King richly rewarded the captain with chests of silver. When the ship returned, the merchant gave Dick all the proceeds from his cat's exploits, which amounted to ten times the value of the cargo, and his daughter's hand in marriage. With such wealth, and his honest pluck, Dick did indeed thrice become Lord Mayor of London. Dick and his cat lived happily ever after.

"[A]nd so out again and by water to Somerset House, but when come thither I turned back and to Southwarke-Fair, very dirty, and there saw the puppet-show of Whittington, which was pretty to see; and how that idle thing do work upon people that see it, and even myself too!"

-- Samuel Pepys, *Diary*, (Sep. 21, 1668)

That basic story, with some variations, may have appeared in English in the fifteenth century, most likely in ballad form. It doesn't seem to have surfaced in print until a [1605 play](#) (now lost), *The History of Richard Whittington, his low birth, his great fortune*. In 1611, Beaumont and Fletcher referenced it in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, and when the Jacobean engraver Reynold Elstracke produced an image of Richard Whittington with his hand on a skull, popular outrage forced him to re-engrave the drawing, replacing the skull with a cat.

By the later 17th century, Dick and the cat had made the transition to the puppet-stage, alongside [Mister Punch](#) and his esteemed cast members. In the 18th century, Oliver Goldsmith tried to rework the play to remove the cat, but got nowhere with it. In 1814, the greatest clown of Regency England, Joey Grimaldi, recast the Dick Whittington puppet-play as a "pantomime" (a sort of burlesque melodrama), initially playing the love interest Cecily. In 1816, Grimaldi reworked the "panto" and essayed the role of Dick himself, in *Harlequin Whittington; or, the Mayor of London*. In the pantomime version, Dick's cat gets a name, Tommy, and a nemesis, the Rat King. (Some scholars think that the Rat King entered the puppet-play in 1668 as a response to the terrors of the Plague year.) The action is generally set in Morocco, rather than some nameless Barbary kingdom. Ever since, various versions of the "Dick Whittington panto" have appeared in English theaters, even as various versions of the folktale appeared in children's books and scholarly compendia alike.

"Beneath this stone lies Wittington,

Sir Richard rightly named,

Who three times Lord Mayor served in London,

In which he ne'er was blamed.

He rose from indigence to wealth

By industry and that,

For lo! he scorned to gain by stealth

What he got by a cat."

-- supposed epitaph of Richard Whittington

There was, as it happens, an original Dick Whittington, and he was indeed thrice (plus one) Mayor of London. The historical Dick, the epitaph to the contrary, was never knighted himself, although he was the son of a knight, Sir William Whittington of Gloucestershire. He did marry Alice, daughter of Sir Ivo FitzWarren, an alderman and a big wheel in the Mercer's guild of London. He loaned money to [Richard II](#), and as a reward was appointed Mayor in 1397 after Richard had stripped the city of its liberties. (The title Lord Mayor wasn't used until 1540.) His good luck survived Richard's overthrow, however; he was elected Mayor in his own right three times, in 1398, 1406, and 1416. He remained on good terms with Henry IV and Henry V, paying much of the cost of the war in France himself. He died childless in 1423, and left his vast wealth to charity, endowing a hospital, fountains, and Newgate Prison. Nobody has any good explanation for where the cat came from. One questionable Whittington coat of arms has a cat on it; other theories postulate that Whittington made his wealth trading with North Sea ships called "cats" allude to the French *achat*, meaning "purchase."

"According to Wassaf, the island derived its name from one Kais, the son of a poor widow of Siraf (then a great port of Indian trade on the northern shore of the Gulf), who on a voyage to India, about the 10th century, made a fortune precisely as Dick Whittington did. The proceeds of the cat were invested in an establishment on this island."

-- Sir Henry Yule, footnote to the *Travels of Marco Polo*

It's more likely that Londoners, seeing the evidence of Whittington's vast wealth around them, inserted his name into the already extant story of the poor boy who makes good with a cat. This tale dates back in Europe to the *Hamburg Chronicle of Albert* of 1256, a century before Richard Whittington was even born; in the *Chronicle*, it is set in 1175 and serves as the origin story for the wealth of Venice. Other versions exist in Danish, Russian, Norse, Breton, and Icelandic folk literature. (In the Norse version, the cat sometimes wields strange supernatural powers that compel the ship captain to return the reward to the poor boy.) A typically perverse 15th-century Genoese version adds a sequel, in which a greedy merchant tries to woo the King of Barbary with rich silks and receives a cat in exchange. A version in Persia, which may be either the earliest iteration of the tale, or an adaptation of the story taken from Crusaders who brought it from Europe, puts all the work and misery on the mother, whose cat earns her shiftless sons a fortune, which they use to turn pirate.

"I am clean of mouth and clean of hands.

Therefore let it be said unto me 'Come in peace'

For I have heard that mighty Word which the spirits

Spake unto the Cat in the House of Hapt-Re."

-- Egyptian Book of the Dead, CXXV

In all of them, the cat performs his (or her) miracles off stage, in the "land without cats," be it Barbary, Morocco, India, or wherever. In the earlier versions of the tale, Dick simply sells his cat sight unseen to the King, and retires to count his money as Lord Mayor; in some versions, he doesn't have the cat with him when he hears the prophetic bells, either. Joey Grimaldi straightened that up; the Cat's return with the treasure becomes an important thematic climax, and the Cat accompanies Dick on many strange adventures in London before they make their fortune. But even in Grimaldi's tight version, the center of the story is this: a young man sends a familiar beast to a rich, inaccessible place of mystery -- an Otherworld -- from whence treasure comes to him. "Dick Whittington and His Cat" is essentially a story of magical treasure seeking given a Tudor proto-capitalist gloss.

Not only the Norse version features a strange supernatural cat. In a variant in the *Arabian Nights*, "The Tale of Abu Mohammed Hight Lazybones," the "cat" is actually a powerful, malevolent djinn who begins the story in the form of a shaved ape. Abu Mohammed brings him to heel with a magical musk and a vulture talisman; which is exotic enough, but he does so with the help of the "brothers of the white serpent." Even our old familiar Dick Whittington sometimes gets his cat not by thrift but by the mysterious actions of an [old woman](#) he meets in the street. She gives him a cat for a penny, and vanishes into the crowd.

"No doubt the dead beast was once one of that army of animals known collectively as 'the city cats.' They were the guardians of London, patrolling streets and territories down which their distant ancestors once trod on quiet paws."

-- Peter Ackroyd, *London: the Biography*

Perhaps the old woman stood on Gresham Street, named in 1845 for another man who produced fortunes out of seeming nothing, the Elizabethan financier Thomas Gresham. In Gresham's day, and in Whittington's, the street was Cateaton Street, or Cattestreet, or simply Cat Street. Other storied London cat-haunts include Drury Lane (described by Dickens as home to whole communities of felines), Clerkenwell Green and St. George's Fields (both parks marred by famous riots), and [Whitechapel](#) Lane, where "an ancient whore" was often seen feeding cats meat from a basket in the late 19th century. Could that be the same old woman who sold the cat to Dick Whittington for a silver penny -- in exchange for his future? Or London's? The cat is the symbol not only of Bast, the enigmatic Egyptian goddess, but of Freya (whose cats, like those in the Finnish *Kalevala*, draw a chariot to the Otherworld), [Diana](#) . . . and [Hecate](#). What bargain did Hecate cut with Dick Whittington, to show him the [gold paving the streets](#) of secret London?

In this context it's intriguing to note that another theory exists claiming the Gloucester Whittington is an imposter. In this version, the real Dick Whittington was apparently a lad from The Newnes, a hamlet near Whittington in Shropshire. He was sent to London by Roger de Hampton, a vicar of the Knights Hospitaller. And where, prithee, did the Hospitallers have their London priory? Why, Clerkenwell Green, haunt of cats and conspirators since the Middle Ages. The paw-prints of Dick Whittington are still here, if you know where to look. The statue of his cat on the front of Newgate Prison is gone, but a feline monument (Whittington Stone) still graces Highgate, where Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Blake each in their own way also journeyed to the Otherworld. Is there a connection to the dark entity with ["glowing red eyes"](#) seen in Highgate Cemetery? Does Dick Whittington's cat still guard the gateway from the "brothers of the white serpent"? (Ra, should you be interested, takes the form of a cat to kill the serpent Apep in some late Egyptian art.) Was this part of the deal that Hecate struck with the Knights Hospitaller?

One last note, one last journey into Barbary, before the end. Richard Whittington, four times Mayor of London, was buried in St. Michael Paternoster Royal church, which he had rebuilt in 1409. It was destroyed in the Great Fire (the one that balked King Rat's plague, just before Dick Whittington's puppet shows began) and rebuilt in 1686-1694 by the Masonic architect Sir Christopher Wren. (At this time, Wren added statues of Moses and Aaron -- defeaters of Pharaoh's serpents.) Damaged in the Blitz, the church was slated for reconstruction in 1949. The workman did not discover the grave of Dick Whittington, as had been thought. But he did find, sealed in a passage under the roof, a mummified cat. Oh, yes he did!

Making a Scene (Into an RPG)

One of the interesting articles from *Star Wars Gamer #1* was "Duel of the Fates."

Side notes: This magazine was, as the name implies, a magazine devoted to various games based on the *Star Wars* brand: RPGs, video games, card games, and so on. My use of the word "was," is, as the past tense implies, chosen because of the publication's past-tense status. This is a shame, since it was a good magazine. On the other hand, its mandate may have had a hard time finding an audience, in much the same way a magazine devoted to professional football, football video games, **Blood Bowl**, hacky sacks, and that game you play with the folded triangle "football" may face an uphill battle.

Anyway, "Duel of the Fates." This article describes the climactic battle in *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* between Qui-Gon Jinn, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Darth Mung in terms of the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game**. In doing so, it breaks down the action into rounds, describing what techniques and rolls the "players" were getting.

This article was far from perfect; for example, it assumes that a well-trained Sith Lord drops out of combat rounds in order to . . . um . . . gloat?, thus giving Obi-Wan a chance to get a surprise action and turn the tide. (This ranks up there with someone playing a thief saying, "I point behind my foe, and when he turns around to see who I'm pointing at, I'll backstab him in a surprise action.") On the other hand, it's really no more silly than the source; for all I know, the movie's script was written in terms of game stats.

However, the basic premise of the article – and the basic premise of this column, finally presented a mere third into it – is that we can learn something by trying to break down cinematic moments into gaming terms.

I suspect many gamers are seeking to recreate – or, more fairly, create whole-cloth – the feeling we get when watching an exciting movie or television series or reading a riveting book or comic. To that end, there are many techniques games use to bring a more "cinematic" feel to them, including combat options, "hero points" or similar game-altering bits, and open-ended systems that allow for extreme results.

So it's only fitting to work backwards sometimes and see if the action in these media can be translated into game terms; The results can be interesting, and may lead to better gaming all around.

Side notes two: The phenomenon of translating between media and games was also brought to the forefront of my mind during a discussion on the *Pyramid* discussion boards about gaming novels from a month or two ago. A few people commented on books where, at one extreme, one could see the item-by-item breakdown of gaming terms within it ("A-ha! This must be when the protagonist went up a level and got the special abilities from the *Player's Handbook!*"), and at the other extreme where people accomplish things within a book that are utterly impossible within a game . . . especially in novels supposedly based on a game. Soooo . . . thanks, yet again, to my peeps at sjgames.pyramid. You're the best.

Anyway, I humbly propose a few things to consider when comparing on-screen and in-game actions and possibilities.

Is the action feasible? Is it possible to recreate the action of the book/movie/whatever at all using the game system? In books it's sometimes possible for a fledgling wizard to down a giant dragon with one minor bolt of flame, but in most RPGs it just can't happen.

These situations are a double-edged sword for RPGs. On the one hand, these kind of "extreme" situations are often the most satisfying aspect of the medium – someone using their abilities to do something they ever thought of, or succeeding in a way that just isn't possible. On the other hand, making these abilities even within the bounds of feasibility can wreak havoc on a game system; if it's possible for a dragon to be killed by a minor bolt, how can any encounter with a dragon in the future hold any weight?

What can be done if an action isn't feasible? Well, it might be possible to tweak the system to allow really outside-

the-box solutions . . . but make them very difficult. For example, the 1980's **Marvel Super-Heroes Advanced Edition RPG** introduced the idea of "power stunts." Basically, characters can use their powers to do things they've never done before, but that fit within the broad framework of their powers. For example, the first time Spider-Man used his webbing to make a glider and "fly," that was a power stunt; before then, he'd only used his webbing to swing around town and entangle folks. This system worked surprisingly well, since it required the player to spend a lot of Karma (the game's combination experience points and die-roll modifiers); thus it became a type of on-the-fly character enhancement. The first time the character used a power stunt it was very difficult; a few times later it's easier, and eventually it becomes part of his repertoire. This prohibitive cost keeps players from thinking up cockamamie solutions all the time, while permitting them the framework to "bend" the rules when it's necessary.

Is the action likely? Just because it's technically possible for the rules to support an action, that doesn't mean it's ever likely to come up in a campaign. For example, in a game with open-ended damage (where, say, you get to reroll a six-sider if it rolls a six the first time), it may be possible for that 1D6 fire bolt to kill the 200-hit-point dragon in one blow. The only problem is, it'd be about a one in 57,302,359,991,614,086,367,621,939 chance. These aren't the kind of odds you'd want to base a campaign around, since, assuming a weekly game, you'd need to play approximately one septillion millennia for this event to occur naturally. (In discussions on *Pyramid* newsgroups, I'm only aware of three groups that've been gaming that long.)

In general, the more "convergence" that's required from various oddball rules, lucky (or unlucky) rolls, and *just* the right choices, the less likely the outcome is. On the other hand, sometimes "likely" actions are incredibly possible, and just rely on existing rules to be exploited creatively. (For example, it was an amazing day when my **Vampire: The Dark Ages** telekinetic discovered that, despite puny stature and weak strength, she was more than able to lift foes into the air and drop them from amazing heights for damage. And it would've made a good scene in a movie, too.)

Is it possible to recreate the action? If it's been determined that the action is both possible and within the realm of mathematical feasibility, the next question is can a gaming group recreate that action. This is most often possible in systems that allow extensive creativity in their meta-gaming rules. For example, **Torg** and **Masterbook** are designed around a card system that allows and even encourages players to hoard cards and play for the dramatic moment, where bonus after bonus can be stacked. This, coupled with a logarithmic scale, permit truly incredible cinematic events in those systems.

A excellent example of how it can be possible to recreate cinematic actions in a game can be found in Chad Underkoffler's ["Cinematic Points!: GURPS Rules for Cinematic Play"](#) article.

Do the rules which allow this recreation create additional problems? Finally, if existing rules are creatively exploited or added to achieve a cinematic end, do they introduce more problems than they solve?

A good example can be found with the old **Star Wars RPG**. That system wanted to allow people to tap "the Force" and achieve cinematic effects such as – hypothetically speaking – blowing up your average Death Star. The system they came up with allowed a player to double the number of dice he rolled for one action; thus someone who would get, say, 4D6 in Death Star Up-Blowing would find themselves rolling eight dice if they take advantage of this rule. Death Star techies go boom!

Of course, no doubt an early design problem was trying to make sure this couldn't be abused. For example, if someone could do it whenever they wanted, then many plots could be derailed early on. (For example, if Han Solo suddenly got to roll a jillion dice to shoot Darth Vader, the whole "Dinner with Lando" scene might have gone differently.) Even limiting this to once an adventure could still be problematic. Fortunately, the designers were able to keep the burst of greatness contained by the idea of Force Points; these points can be spent whenever the player wants, but they can only be regained if used to greatly serve the greater good. In fact, if they're used for purely selfish reasons, the player would get a Dark Side Point instead, which isn't good.

As a counter-example, the original Mayfair **DC Heroes** RPG had about 975 iterations of gadgeteering rules. Each time something was added to allow something seen in the comics (such as those universal "could be anything" gadgets Batman pulls out of his belt), something else would break (such as a fork that can only be used once and costs \$50,000). Trying to permit players to perform feats like the comics either enabled them to do things that *weren't* in the

comics ("Fortunately I have a Magic Detector in my utility belt!") or made them so costly that no one would ever use those rules to emulate the comics.

The best cinematic rules simultaneously explain why certain scenes play out the way they do *and* explain why other scenes aren't broken.

- How does Spider-Man make strange things out of webbing such as hang gliders, shields, and skis? By doing a "power stunt." Why doesn't he do it more often? Because it's expensive to do a power stunt; it's a good "out" if he's in a pinch, but it's not a first resort.
- How does Lando blow up the Death Star without being a miraculous pilot the rest of the time? By using a Force Point. Why isn't he able to accomplish incredible feats the rest of the time? Because he doesn't want to squander a Force Point nor risk gaining a Dark Side Point.
- How does [Voltron](#) save the day? With its awesome Blazing Sword attack. Why doesn't Voltron use its Blazing Sword in the first eight second of combat? Maybe its power needs to [charge](#) in battle.

And so on.

Turning a keen eye back and forth between favored media and RPGs can spark new ideas and ways of looking at both, making scenes on both sides of the equations better. As ever, it can be good to take the scenic route.

--*Steven Marsh*

White Ships and Black Hearts

Setting Green Ronin's Freeport in H.P. Lovecraft's Dreamlands

by Tim Emrick

"More than ever Kuranos wished to sail in a galley to the far places of which he had heard so many strange tales . . ."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "Celephais"

One of the strengths of Green Ronin's Freeport line is its generic treatment of the gods and other background details, while still making the city a vibrant, living, memorable place to adventure. This policy allows DMs to incorporate Freeport into their existing campaigns with minimal effort. To that end, a new home would be an easy fit: the dream-world created by H.P. Lovecraft.

Unlike most of his modern-day stories, Lovecraft's dream-tales portray just the sort of highly magical world that fits the heroic style of the standard **d20 System** fantasy setting -- with a few dark twists. These stories are full of epic quests, marvelous magic, fantastic monsters, ineffable gods, and curious wanderers delving into Things Man Was Not Meant to Know.

From its birth, the Freeport line has incorporated a number of elements drawn from Lovecraft's work (most notably Yig), as well as the weird tales of Clark Ashton Smith (the serpent people) and Robert W. Chambers (the Yellow Sign). Why not raise the "Cthulhu Mythos" quotient even further? Add in more evil cultists, weird alien races, and -- especially for the pirates -- priceless treasures that just happen to drive you insane.

For the Freeport half of this mix, you will need ***Death in Freeport*** (for the serpent people) and ***Freeport: The City of Adventure*** (for an overview of the city). For the rest of the world, you will want a collection of Lovecraft's dream stories, ***The Complete Dreamlands*** (for ***Call of Cthulhu***), or both. The bibliography at the end of this article lists additional resources.

Where is Freeport?

According to ***Freeport: The City of Adventure***, Freeport is on a semi-tropical island in the Serpent's Teeth, located some distance from the mainland. These islands are fragments of ancient Valossa, so should not be located in a region that has been settled for more than a millennium. Freeport should be about two weeks' sail from the nearest major city, such as Celephais, Hlanith, or Baharna. If you use the map in ***The Complete Dreamlands***, any of the small archipelagos in the Southern Sea would be suitable.

While equating Freeport with Dylath-Leen may be tempting, that city seems a bit too unrelentingly sinister, even for Freeport -- and it is on the mainland.

Races and Classes in the Dreamlands

The Dreamlands are vast, and relatively few of its peoples have been described. This gives the DM a lot of freedom in placing the standard player races, monster races, and any new creatures he wishes to include. DMs who wish to preserve some sense of "canon" may wish to limit the number of nonhumans appearing within the better-documented realms such as Ulthar and Celephais. (Note, however, that goblins are known to live in the Enchanted Wood, and that halflings can be used to represent the pygmies of the Jungles of Kled.)

Freeport: City of Adventure suggests that kuo-toa, orcs, and lizardfolk dwell somewhere south of the Serpent's Teeth, while ***Black Sails Over Freeport*** assumes that human barbarians ("northerners") and elves live in close proximity on

the mainland.

All of the standard **d20 System** classes can be found in the Dreamlands. However, barbarians and monks will almost never be native to Freeport, often coming from distant lands that are exotic even by Dreamlands standards.

Of the standard **d20 System** prestige classes, the arcane trickster, assassin, eldritch knight, horizon walker, loremaster, and mystic theurge have the best precedents in the stories of Lovecraft and Smith. Of course, the new prestige classes appearing in *Freeport: City of Adventure* and *Tales of Freeport* are excellent choices for campaigns set there.

Languages in the Dreamlands

The dream-world has the strange property that nearly all humans speak the same language. This idea fits nicely with the game convention of a "common tongue" -- simply assign Common to the player races as normal. Men from Inquanok, Leng, and Lomar (all in the far north) have their own native languages, however, and must learn Common as a bonus language or through the Speak Language skill.

Besides the basic languages of the **d20 System**, others unique to the Dreamlands are available. These include the languages of ghouls, serpent people (Valossan), and zoogs, and the supposedly dead languages of Aklo and Hyperborean.

The Gods of Freeport

Most humans worship the Great Ones, a pantheon of human-like and more-or-less benign deities. This family of gods is large and diverse, allowing the DM to invent a new one for any needed niche. (Classical mythology is a good source of inspiration here, but follow Lovecraft's lead and borrow only the more obscure gods, such as Hypnos.) Clerics in smaller communities might serve the pantheon as a whole, rather than a single god; these can choose from nearly any alignment and domain. However, such generalists are rare in cities the size of Freeport.

The Dreamlands are also home to several Elder Gods (Bast, Nodens), Great Old Ones (Bokrug, Yig), minor local deities (Oukranos), and malevolent, alien Outer Gods (the Unspeakable One, the Crawling Chaos).

Some nonhumans will have racial gods (Yig for serpent people, Krom for orcs), while others worship a variety of gods based on the main concerns of their race, tribe, or profession.

According to *Freeport: The City of Adventure*, the four most popular gods locally are those of Knowledge, Warriors, the Sea, and Pirates. As good matches, the God of Knowledge can be with Nasht, the God of Warriors with N'tse-Kaambl, and the Sea God with Nodens. The Dreamlands has no convenient Pirate God, but *Black Sails Over Freeport* has provided new information on this deity; in Dreamlands terms, Harrimast is probably an Elder God.

For DMs who own *The Complete Dreamlands*, some additional suggestions for identifying generic gods mentioned in Freeport products include: Death (Zo-Kalar), Justice/Retribution/Sun (Ariel), Magic (Tamash), and Murder (Hagarg Ryonis).

Monsters of Nightmare

The *Call of Cthulhu d20 RPG* includes several creatures found in the Dreamlands, including the dhole, formless spawn, ghoul, gug, nightgaunt, Servitor of the Outer Gods, and spider of Leng. In addition, Freeport has its own version of serpent people, and the Yithians are alluded to in *Death in Freeport*.

The Dreamlands are also home to several monsters found in the standard **d20 System**, including the basilisk, goblin, mantichore, and several mundane animals. For the following Dreamlands monsters, the **d20 System** monsters in parentheses will serve as good approximations:

- boltworm (behir)
- butterfly-dragon (pseudodragon)
- cat from Saturn (displacer beast)
- cloudbeast (advanced belker)
- fireworm (thoqqua)
- gnorri (merfolk or triton)
- Ib-being (kuo-toa)
- nightrider (dire bat)
- razortongue (shocker lizard)
- shade (shadow)
- slime mold (various oozes)
- voonith (giant constrictor snake)
- zebra (pony)

Many other monsters will fit the spirit of a Dreamlands game, particularly those of the aberration type.

Note that horses do not appear in Lovecraft's dream-tales; zebras, camels, and yaks are used instead. Either substitute those animals, or ignore the omission and have horses available normally.

Cats in the Dreamlands are far more intelligent than their "waking world" counterparts (Int, Wis, Cha each 3d6), and have a true language that can only be understood by other cats and certain gifted ailurophiles. They can advance in NPC classes, and should be treated as magical beasts. The DM can either endow all cats with this higher awareness, or treat these as a special subrace. Cats will recognize other magical felines (such as familiars and animal companions) for what they are, and will react to them based on their reaction to the companion's master.

Cat Friend [General Feat]

You love cats, and have become a trusted friend of the species.

Prerequisites: Cha 13+, non-evil alignment, must have saved a cat's life at personal risk.

Benefits: You may speak with cats (as the *Speak with Animals* spell, at will), and have a +2 circumstance bonus to all Charisma checks and Charisma-based skill checks (including wild empathy) against cats. Cats within 30 feet who can see or hear you gain a +1 morale bonus to all saving throws, and an additional +1 against fear effects. If you have the Leadership feat, you may attract cat followers.

Dreaming of Adventure

The Dreamlands are a highly magical fantasy realm, with all the usual adventures that implies. To capture the unique flavor of these realms, emphasize the bizarre and fantastic elements, and make sure that magic and other esoteric lore is frequently dangerous to its user. Some adventure ideas include:

- A talking cat approaches a druid or ranger character, and asks for help in repelling attacks by zoogs or cats from Saturn. This mission might involve merely crossing a city or a kingdom, or a trip to the Moon with an army of cats.
- An oddly-dressed visitor claims that certain lands of myth and fable are real places, and is hiring a crew to find them. The stranger attracts attention from both mercenary treasure-seekers and unsavory sorts who prey on the gullible.
- A band of dark-skinned wanderers passes through town. They worship strange animal-headed gods, which incites paranoia among townsfolk (and the authorities) about a dangerous new cult. The travelers are peaceful, but can unleash powerful curses if molested.
- The Freeport Opera House plans a new production. All previous attempts to stage this obscure play have ended in tragedy, and the superstitious actors take every minor problem during rehearsals as a dire omen. Unknown to

the managers, the play truly is cursed, and will invoke a horrible doom if completed.

See the Bibliography below for some published adventures appropriate to the Dreamlands.

Other Worlds: Beyond the Dreamlands

DMs who wish to limit the scope of their campaign to one plane, with occasional elemental and outsider visitors, can simply treat the Dreamlands as any other Prime Material Plane within the standard **d20 System** Cosmology. (*Hell in Freeport*, for instance, assumes this generic structure.) However, some DMs may wish to explore the implications inherent in adventuring in a dream-realm.

Most creatures (including the player characters) will be natives to the Dreamlands, and unable to travel to other dimensions without the help of magic. Others will be from a dimension that they think of as "the waking world," and travel to this one through dreams. These "dreamer" characters normally seem to be just like any other people, though often ignorant of local customs and languages, and prone to mention people, places, and technology that do not exist in this world. Most dreamers start in an NPC class, and many will simply blend into the general populace, never distinguishing themselves. Others can manipulate dream-stuff to some extent, acquire levels in PC classes, and become great heroes of legend.

Awaken from Nightmare (Sp): Most dreamers have the ability to leave the Dreamlands through an act of will, and re-enter them during a future night's sleep. This is a spell-like ability that requires a standard action and a Concentration check (DC 15, or 20 if "casting" defensively). If successful, the dreamer fades away, returning to his native plane, and cannot reenter the Dreamlands for at least d% days (Dreamlands time). The dreamer also loses one level, representing the rapid fading of memories upon awakening; for this reason, experienced travelers avoid using this "escape route" except in dire need. *Dimensional anchor* and similar spells will prevent the use of this power within the area of effect. A dreamer whose "waking world" body dies while dreaming can no longer Awaken from Nightmare, and must live out the remainder of his life in the Dreamlands.

Powder and Print: Technology in the Dreamlands

According to *The Complete Dreamlands*, the world of dream resists technological progress, lagging behind the "waking world" by about five centuries. From a point-of-view of a typical *Call of Cthulhu* game (1920s or 1990s-2000s), this means that firearms and printing presses are just starting to appear in the Dreamlands.

Freeport assumes an early Renaissance tech level, with the advanced sailing ships, lighter weapons and armor, and flintlock weapons that are associated with the Age of Piracy. Here is quick overview of available technology that is more advanced than the usual "medieval" standard of **d20 System**:

Armor & Weapons: At sea, the weight of armor is a liability, and all but the lightest gear is a sure invitation to drowning. Reducing physical protection means that successful fighting styles depend on speed and mobility. Offhand weapons replace bulky shields, and the rapier and cutlass replace heavier blades. These preferences carry over onto land, where bulky arms and armor often attract more unwanted attention than they keep away. The hand crossbow and repeating crossbow are available, though still exotic.

Firearms: Ever since *Freeport: The City of Adventure* introduced optional firearms rules, new Freeport products have assumed their presence. These weapons were only invented a few years ago, so are still rare and expensive. The DM's choice here is no different in the Dreamlands than in any other setting: use firearms if you want them; ignore them if you don't.

The Printed Word: Printing presses have been available for a few generations. The presses themselves remain rare and costly, but their products have become affordable to the common man. Broadsheets (newspapers and public notices) cost only a few coppers each, while the cheapest books begin at a few gold. Works with fancy type or illustrations remain expensive, largely due to the time required to set the type, engrave the image plates, and bind the

finished book in a cover worthy of the content. (Note that scribes remain in high demand for copying books that have limited audiences and thus never see a press.)

Sewers: Renaissance cities are more populous than medieval ones, so sanitation becomes even more critical. In many cities (including Freeport), elaborate sewer systems are the answer. The city often remains just as grubby as it was a few centuries before, but without the sewers, the increased population would soon drown in filth -- if a plague didn't wipe it out first.

Ships & Navigation: Sailing ships are becoming quite advanced, and can stay at sea for months. Navigation aids such as the sextant, compass, and accurate sea charts are now common (though still costly). Clockwork devices are sophisticated enough to provide accurate time-keeping, and provide an attractive option for spellcasters who enchant constructs.

Conclusion: Mal Voyage!

The heart of Lovecraft's work is the gradual discovery of horrible ancient truths underlying the present. The sea and its creatures embody this theme in an elemental way -- even the saltiest sailor has had only glimpses of what lies hidden below. Where better to face these horrors than Freeport, which was built on dark deeds that remain unfathomed? Pray to Harrimast, but keep your cutlass handy!

Bibliography: Forbidden Lore

Fiction

- *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, by H.P. Lovecraft: His only novel-length dream-tale. See also his short stories "The Cats of Ulthar," "Celephais," "The Doom That Came to Sarnath," "The Other Gods," "The Quest of Iranon," and "The White Ship". (These were most recently reprinted in Ballantine's *The Dream-Cycle of H.P. Lovecraft*.)
- *The House of the Worm*, by Gary Myers: A collection of stories set in Lovecraft's dream-world.
- *Hyperborea*, by Clark Ashton Smith: A collection of tales; "The Seven Geases" features the serpent people.

RPGs

- ***Freeport: The City of Adventure*** (Green Ronin, for ***d20 System***): The main sourcebook for all things Freeport.
- ***Death in Freeport*, *Terror in Freeport*, and *Madness in Freeport*** (Green Ronin, for ***d20***): The classic "Freeport Trilogy" of pirates and unspeakable cults.
- ***Call of Cthulhu d20 RPG*** (Wizards of the Coast): See the "Lovecraftian D&D Appendix" about using this material in Freeport (or other ***d20 System*** fantasy settings).
- ***The Complete Dreamlands*** (Chaosium, for ***Call of Cthulhu***): A vast store of information on Lovecraft's dream-world as well as the embroiderings upon it by other writers. The adventure "Lemon Sails" is especially well-suited to Freeport.

Web Resources

- [Green Ronin Publishing](#): Several free online resources, including "Focus on Freeport" and a forum devoted to the setting.
- [DnDChick's Dreamlands d20 System Page](#): Erica Balsley's conversions of ***Call of Cthulhu*** creatures to ***d20 System***
- [Tim's d20 System Errata & Notes](#): This website devoted to commentary about Freeport, Cthulhu, and selected other ***d20 System*** products.
- ["The Masters of Space and Time"](#) and ["The Children of Yig"](#) by Shannon Appel: Articles on the Yithians and serpent people, reprinted from *Starry Wisdom* magazine.

- ["The Green Box: An Out of Body Experience,"](#) by Dennis Detwiler and Mike Mearls (*d20 Weekly*, October 9, 2002): A template for Yithians possessing human bodies.

Icosahedron Adventures: The Out-of-Towners I: Angel's Harbor

Ally NPC Seeds for Modern Games

by Owen K.C. Stephens

As a companion piece to "[Rogues Gallery I: Angel's Harbor](#)," this article presents a number of allies for use in modern or near modern pulp/street hero genre **d20 System** games. Like the rogue's gallery article, these are not fully written NPCs, but rather descriptions followed by a few rule mechanics to give them a unique flavor. Rather than have the rules mechanics be random exceptions to the normal rules (as was done in last month's article), these NPCs are presented as having one or more edges.

Edges are feats that are somewhat more powerful than the standard, but not so off scale as to ruin a campaign. Most games with edges limit characters to a set number. This may be no more than one edge per character, or not more than one edge per five character levels. A GM can use edges to build pulp/superhero-appropriate prestige classes, or simply have a Pulp Hero core class that grants a bonus feat or edge every three levels. Different methods are best for different campaigns, and most GMs can tell at a glance if they wish to allow edges, and if so how common they wish them to be.

El Grande

El Grande is a Mexican masked wrestler and hero. For more than 20 years, he has been both a defender of the common man and an iconic hero found in movies, comics and stage shows throughout Mexico and Central America. Dressed in his full face mask and caped costume of green, red, black, and white, El Grande manages to be a professional wrestler, pop culture icon, and actual functioning hero. He is also spokesman for the El Grande Foundation, a charitable organization that takes money he makes from movies, wrestling pay-per-view, and merchandising, and uses it to help sick and poor children in Mexico. So dedicated is El Grande to this cause, he insists all movies starring him are made as cheaply as possible, to ensure more money goes to the Foundation.

Outside of Mexico, most people believe El Grande is simply an actor, with a slowly increasing presence in America as he does occasional Mc Burger commercials and guest appearances on dying sit-coms. In truth, El Grande is a hero who, along with occasional companions, faces threats both mundane and supernatural wherever they appear in Mexico. He is best used either as local color if PCs travel to Mexico, or as a visiting hero following a case from his homeland to the PCs' stomping grounds. Either way, El grande is thrilled to work with other adventurers . . . but only on his rather cinematic terms.

Physically, El Grande is big. Really big. He stands seven feet two inches tall and weighs 400 pounds. Though he makes pains not to reveal it, his physique shows signs of the 20 years of adventuring he's put it through. He now dyes the hair on his arms, which have turned gray. His wide belt, once just protection, now holds back a slowly growing gut. Scars criss-cross his body, and often ache in cold weather, and his trick knee actually allows him to predict precipitation an hour or so before it falls.

However, he is still extremely strong and tough, and more than a match for any normal man; he still possesses excellent combat skills, especially in holds and locks. As the man himself will bombastically declare, "Nobody escapes the grasp of El Grande!" As over-the-top as the claim may seem, to date it has been accurate. Large, strong and skilled in decades of wrestling satanic robots and Aztec mummy were-jaguars, El Grande has successfully defeated any foe he's managed to grapple. Of course most of his enemies are aware of this, and go to great lengths to stay away from the man's grip. Many make it a point to have minions swarm him in large numbers, since it takes time for El Grande to grab each one and squeeze them into submission -- time that can be used to escape or have other minions beat on the

masked wrestler's cranium.

This tactic is particularly effective because El Grande doesn't let someone go once he has them grappled until they submit or are knocked out. Even if it makes more tactical sense to release a foe and grab someone else, El Grande takes pride in his legendary grasp, and isn't about to allow anyone to be the first to escape it. Sometimes he thinks far enough ahead not to grab a minor foe when he needs to focus on a bigger threat -- but not always.

El Grande is most useful as an ally and foil. He's a good man and here to help, but his help doesn't always go the way other heroes might prefer. Subtlety isn't beyond him conceptually, he just has no use for it. For example, he always wears his mask. He can change the rest of his costume as needed, to jogging suit, tuxedo or swim trunks, but the mask stays. It's his symbol, and a symbol to his fans who look to him for hope and inspiration. It's his private flag, heraldry of a modern knight, and there's just no way he'll take it off. The man sleeps in it, and can even put on a new one without taking of the old one. He has extra-stretchy masks to wear while showering, to ensure he can wash his face and hair, but he still does it masked.

He also has no use for behavior he sees as cowardly or cruel. It's not that El Grande never breaks the law (though he has great respect for the rule of law, except where it gets in the way of justice), but he does not believe in using lies, deception, torture, poison, mind control, or threats of the same, to meet a goal. He'll question prisoners, but not through intimidation. He'll instead try to shame them into doing the right thing (and, bizarrely, often has good results with this technique). El grande doesn't demand others meet his high standard (he is, after all, an experienced role model for a whole nation), but anyone who proves willing to use genuinely evil tactics soon won't count El Grande as a friend.

Should anyone manage to penetrate the bravado El Grande uses as emotional armor, a more tender side of the aging hero is revealed. El Grande fears the future, and thus refuses to think about it (or plan for it). He has kept no money to speak of for himself, and owns only a tiny one room shack in the poorer side of Mexico City. He usually spends his nights sleeping in the El Grande Foundation headquarters, or as a guest of fans when on a case, but should he ever feel the need to retire he'll refuse to live on the charity that should be going to children. If he finds himself in a city with no network of fans, he has little money to take care of his basic needs. El Grande is a proud man who won't ask for help, but too far from Mexico, or much into the future, he's sure to need friends to care for him.

Edges: El Grande has two edges -- Big! and Greater Improved Grapple. Also, his costume is laced with silver and cold iron threads, allowing his grapple damage to be treated as silver or cold iron for purposes of penetrating DR.

Big!

[Edge]

You're much larger than most creatures of your species, but not quite a full size category up.

Prerequisites: Str 13+, Con 15+.

Benefit: Your carrying capacity, food consumption, and grapple checks are figured as if you were one size category larger. For all other purposes you are considered the normal size of your species, including movement, attack rolls, AC/Defense, weapon sizes and the cost of your armor and equipment.

Greater Improved Grapple

[Edge]

Nobody escapes your grasp!

Prerequisite: Improved Grapple

Benefit: A character with Greater Improved Grapple figures his grapple check as +1 per level, +Str bonus, +6 (this includes the +4 bonus for Improved Grapple). Additionally, he gains another +1 for every feat he has that is not a Metamagic, Psionic or Item Creation feat.

When grappling, you continue to threaten spaces around you, and can make melee attacks into them rather than grapple checks if you prefer. If you make a grapple check at -10, you may move with a grappled foe at your full move

rate.

Gotcha

Gotcha is a thin, reedy man with a weak chin, big ears, and buck teeth. He grew up as Simon Felter, 90-pound weakling in the Sterling family, a clan of burly policemen, firefighters and soldiers. Indeed, he wasn't even a direct relative, being a distant cousin adopted when his original parents were killed. The Sterlings loved him, but felt he needed to "toughen up" as a child, and thus did little to help him with the endless streams of bullies that saw him as an easy target.

Unable to compete physically, Felter learned to embarrass his foes into leaving him alone. Anyone who picked on him soon suffered an endless stream of whoopie cushions, dribble glasses, red-hot chewing gum and tied-together shoes. Though he was at first the target of even more bullying, eventually his foes decided bothering him wasn't worth the constant pranking, and stopped.

Felter tried to follow his family's footsteps and become a policeman, but just couldn't pass the physical. Unwilling to live on his family's charity, Felter became a stage magician. His years of prank-pulling as a youth prepared him well for this, and if his heart had been in it he might have become one of the world's best. But Felter spent more time studying for private investigation licenses and trying to get into law school than working on his act. Though not miserable, Felter felt something was missing from his life.

Then one terrible day, Boxcar -- a mob boss -- blew up Felter's family's house during a holiday dinner. The act was in retribution for members of the family arresting the mob boss weeks earlier. Felter, alone, was unable to be there and was thus the only member of his family to survive. Felter knew who was responsible, but was unable to prove it. He considered killing Boxcar, but couldn't bring himself to do it.

Instead, he went back to pranks.

Calling himself Gotcha, he began a campaign of embarrassment and frustration on Boxcar. He piped children's shows into the boss' televisions. He replaced his toothpaste with hemorrhoid cream. He sawed partway through the chair Boxcar always sat in at a local Italian eatery. Gotcha keyed his car, let the air out of his tires, and placed anti-mob stickers on the bumper while it was moving. Boxcar was never hurt, but his reputation was so tarnished he garnered no more respect or fear in the community. Eventually, when one of his underlings was caught, the thug decided to turn in Boxcar rather than go to jail. The organized crime family was relieved to be rid of the sign of their weakness, and did nothing to retaliate.

And suddenly, Gotcha had a life's mission.

Gotcha doesn't believe in violence, at least not harmful violence. Instead, he has made it his life's work to pull pranks on every criminal in the world. As best he is able, he's made a ranked list of masked villains, underworld bosses, mob captains, and typical FBI's most wanted criminals. Starting at the top, he's traveling the world, pulling pranks on these criminals. The pranks never cause serious physical injury, but they do make his victims look stupid. Every prank is designed to destroy the target's credibility (by causing him to claim something fantastic just happened, and then removing all evidence of it before others can confirm it), or ruin his aura of cool and competence (such as hitting him in the face with a pie not once, but every day at the same time for a week).

Obviously Gotcha has become a world-class magician in the years of his quest. He's also learned the value of careful planning, and often has a whole month of pranks in place before triggering the first one. Equally obviously, his insistence on not hurting anyone places him in dangerous situations with no way to defend himself. Somehow, however, Gotcha always finds a way out. Criminals the world over have claimed to have drowned, burned, and just plain shot him to death, but a month later Gotcha strikes again.

Obviously Gotcha is most likely to be encountered when he comes to town to peg some local crimelord. However, Gotcha can also be used to warn a PC he's crossing the line from hero to villain. If Gotcha felt someone was too self-

important or too vicious a vigilante, he'd have no compunctions about hitting him with a cream pie, spraying a polka-dot pattern on his shorts in ink that is invisible until a few hours later, or taping a "spank me I've been bad" sign on his back.

Edges: Gotcha has only one edge, but it's critical to his chosen career. Through good fortune, clean living, and perhaps divine intervention, Gotcha is Unkillable. Despite his lifestyle, he'll die quietly of old age.

In games with a strong mystic or karmic theme, the edge should have pacifism listed as a prerequisite. Gotcha does no real harm, and thus suffers none.

Unkillable

[Edge]

Somehow, you always survive.

Benefit: This edge literally prevents the character from being killed under any circumstances, or even permanently maimed. The character is not über-tough or able to regenerate with great speed, he simply never ends up being killed through whatever combination of luck, mercy and freak coincidence is needed to save him.

If the character is determined to be dead according to the game mechanics, some circumstance prevents his death at the last moment. Usually, the character is also whisked away to safety, unconscious, and doesn't show up again for a month or more. The character can be hurt, captured, or knocked out, but not killed.

White Wolf

In the lands that eventually became Lithuania there was once an order of warlocks who took the form of wolves to fight for justice and freedom, and to protect the people of their lands. Originally commonplace, and hailed as heroes, their order and bloodlines grew thin as centuries of fear and oppression were brought to Lithuania from conquering religions and nations. In time even those descended from the warlocks did not know their power, and they lost the ability to take wolf form. But some small part of the wolf remained within them, and some minor magic still clung to them.

The last of this bloodline is woman named Victoria Vallachia, who also takes the identity of the White Wolf, a vigilante hunter of criminals. Ms. Vallachia works as a freelance reporter, spending much of her time hunting down eastern European war criminals and organized crime leaders. Those she can expose to the authorities she lets the law have. Those who seem likely to escape legal justice she hunts down and punishes herself, and normally her sentence is death. Though her work often keeps her in Europe for months, she's not afraid to track down prey that has fled to other continents, including the Americas.

As both Ms. Vallachia and White Wolf, she tends to work with a tightly knit group of friends, which subconsciously she sees as her pack. Most of these are people she has helped, either saving them from direct harm (such as putting a stop to a mugging) or by gaining justice for their losses when no one else could. Her team changes over time, but usually includes a weaponsmith, a cameraman, an electronics expert, a driver or pilot, and a few junior investigators. White Wolf rarely allows any of her "pack" to enter real danger with her, as she's very protective of their safety.

When operating as an investigator, Ms. Vallachia is first direct and forthright (storming into offices and challenging suspects on the street with a camera) and then patient and dedicated (spending hours on stakeouts and combing through documents). When acting as White Wolf, she reverses her methodology, beginning with long observation of a target before engaging in an all-out assault. She's in peak physical condition, and a skilled climber, tracker, acrobat, and sneak. She's only fair in melee combat (though she does have very short retractable claws built into the gloves of her White Wolf gear), but is a world-class sniper and pistol shooter. Indeed, though she varies what pistols she carries based on her needs, she's almost never without at least two hand-held firearms. Though she doesn't know why, White Wolf knows she never misses anything she's sure she's going to hit. This last vestige of magic in her bloodline allows her to shoot in ways that seem reckless (firing into crowds, hitting targets near explosives, and even shooting in near

total darkness).

White Wolf need not be from Lithuania. She can easily have been brought up anywhere, from a small rural town outside Angel's Harbor to a big city's "Little Lithuania" ethnic quarter. As a dedicated hunter, she is most likely to come to the heroes' attention when following prey into their turf. Her pack mentality may also cause her to hunt down allies of enemies she has already caught -- possibly allies based in Angel's Harbor. Unfortunately White Wolf is suspicious and surly, unlikely to explain herself to anyone who confronts her in an even mildly hostile fashion. Once her trust is gained (usually by helping her overcome some foe), the same pack mentality makes her fiercely loyal and willing to take great risks to help her allies.

Edges: White Wolf can have one, two or three edges depending on the power level of the campaign. In order, these are Deadeye, Scent, and Night Vision.

Deadeye

[Edge]

You're incredibly accurate with ranged weapons.

Prerequisites: Pint Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Far Shot.

Benefit: A character with Deadeye never hits the wrong target. This is not to say every attack he makes successfully hits, it just doesn't ever hit the wrong thing. If an attack made the character hits a target's touch AC/Defense it's considered to have connected physically, but unless it is in fact a touch attack it still has no effect unless it also hits the target's normal AC/Defense.

If an attack doesn't even hit the target's touch AC/Defense, or misses due to concealment or similar effect, the character has the option to have decided at the last moment not to make the ranged attack. The attack action is still used, but the actual attack is not made and no ammunition is spent.

A character with this edge never hits cover or loses a shot into a crowd unless he decides to do so.

Night Vision

[Edge]

You can see very well even in nearly lightless conditions.

Benefit: A character with Nightvision gains the benefit of Low-Light Vision. Additionally, in situation where there is any light available, no matter how dim, the character treats anything in sight as being in shadowy illumination, regardless of range.

Scent

[Edge]

Your sense of smell is far more acute than a normal human's.

Benefit: You gain the scent special ability. Additionally, if you make a Spot or Listen check to notice something that you might also smell, or any time you make a Survival check to track, you gain a +4 bonus to the skill check.

Mr. Dale and Mr. Hodgkins, Attorneys-at-Law and Bizarre Creatures from Outside Time

for Unknown Armies

by Michael Dewar

Mr. Dale: *Ah, good evening to you all. My name is Mr. Dale, and this is my esteemed partner, Mr. Hodgkins. Might I present you with our card?*

Mr. Hodgkins: . . .

* * *

You will not find the esteemed law firm of Dale & Hodgkins in any city in all the world. You will not find their names on any university transcripts or bar exams, or in telephone books or on office stationary.

Rather, you will find them between the ticks of the clock, in the parts of reality where three dimensions are merely a preference, where the impossible is possible and the normal non-existent.

They do not look remarkable, or even very interesting. Mr. Dale is a short scrawny man with fading brown hair and a moustache like an over-used toothbrush. His watery blue eyes twinkle with something that seems like mischief, and his voice is polite, precise and very well-educated.

Mr. Hodgkins is larger, straining to fit into his neat tweed suit, with buzz-cut brown hair. The big black sunglasses which cover his eyes and the long white cane he carries inform the casual observer of his blindness, though a less casual observer might notice that Mr. Hodgkins never seems to bump into anything and sometimes he looks right at you, even if you haven't made a sound. No one knows what Mr. Hodgkin's voice sounds like, because he never speaks, not one word. Mr. Dale does the speaking for the both of them.

Despite their differing physical appearances, they do share a few characteristics. They are astonishingly punctual, always seen together, and the more time you spend with them, the more you become aware of something not quite right, just below the surface. Something like an actor trying to play a part a little too enthusiastically, or a person who is wearing a mask which doesn't quite fit. Something subtly . . . wrong.

Because Mr. Dale and Mr. Hodgkins are not human, not even faintly, and they are most certainly not lawyers. They are something . . . else, something that doesn't quite exist in the same way as the rest of us. They are creatures outside of the narrow path we call time and they manifest this otherness in three main ways. Their failure to age, their yellow reptilian eyes (Mr. Dale wears special contact lenses, but Mr. Hodgkins cannot abide them, thus his pretense of blindness) and their ability to alter time at will. As time-shifters, Dale and Hodgkins are capable of feats that can verge on the miraculous.

First, when they choose to be, they are simply incredibly quick. Their subjective time slows to allow them to consider a perilous situation and react appropriately, effectively meaning that they have double the normal amount of combat actions and can move at double normal human movement rate. Secondly, once a day, they can teleport (or perhaps "time-port") themselves, moving instantaneously in both time and space. They can move anywhere within a particular dimension/plane and up to an hour forwards or backwards in time during this journey. Note that this is independent of any time zones that may exist in your game world. Shifting from Africa to America or vice versa causes hours to be "gained" or "lost", but the extra hour is a change in actual time in addition to this zone change. After "time-porting", they are exhausted for six hours (counted from their point of arrival) from the strain of moving up or down the timestream.

The only physical sign of their presence in our world (apart from themselves) are their neat, white business cards. The business cards read, "Dale & Hodgkins, Attorneys-at-Law" and have no phone number or address listed. But if you tear one up and scatter the pieces, a breeze will sweep them away and Dale and Hodgkins will shortly come calling.

In Campaigns

Dale and Hodgkins work best in a modern but mystical world such as *Unknown Armies*. Their ability to move outside time can be used as subtly or overtly as the gamemaster chooses.

Obviously, as adversaries, Dale and Hodgkins are ridiculously dangerous in a direct fight. They can simply step outside time, slash the character's throats, and then step back in to watch them splutter and gasp. They should rather be used as neutral characters or subtle adversaries (perhaps as Agents of a great or godlike power).

If you do intend to use them as direct enemies, bear in mind that they will need to be outwitted in order to be defeated. What the characters can learn about them (by careful mystical research) is that, while they are outside time, they cannot touch human flesh directly (which will destroy them) or move objects larger than their own body weight. So Dale and Hodgkins could be imprisoned in a jail cell, or shot with a sniper rifle (the bullet hitting before the sound is heard and they are warned to step outside time). There may also be mystical ways to handle them, to enter their world outside time and face them there. There are persistent rumors about an old wooden cuckoo clock which allows you to stop time, though it is up to the DM to decide if they are true . . .

Mr. Dale and Mr. Hodgkins for *Unknown Armies*

Mr. Dale

Body: 40 (Weedy) Knife-fighter: 45 General Athletics: 20

Speed: 60 (Jittery) Dodge: 40 Do Two Things At Once: 60

Mind: 85 (Eccentric) Been alive forever and a day: 60 Law: 40 Notice: 55

Soul: 90 (Other) Flaky Charm: 25 Sincere Lie: 55 Time-Shifter: 60

Mr. Hodgkins

Body: 70 (Bulky) Knife-fighter: 55 General Athletics: 40

Speed: 55 (Surprising) Dodge: 45 Do Two Things At Once: 60

Mind: 60 (Cunning) Been alive forever and a day: 55 Notice: 40

Soul: 90 (Other) Intimidate: 55 Charm: 15 Lie: 25 Time-Shifter: 60 Act Blind: 25

Do Two Things At Once: During combat, if the user makes a successful roll (on any skill that would take an action to use) which is under their Do Two Things At Once, they get an extra action. Note that if this second roll is also under the skill, they do not get a third action. Been alive forever . . . : The general knowledge skill gained from having been alive and active for most of human history.

Time-Shifter: This skill allows the user to move in time and space once per day. The distance is determined by the user, and the time shift is measured in minutes forwards or back up to the result on the roll. After shifting, the user is exhausted for six hours and suffers a -20 penalty on Body, Speed and all related skills for that period. An OACOWA allows up to a 60-minute shift, and halves the period of post-shift exhaustion to three hours. A BOHICA shifts them to

a GM-selected place and time.

Note: Since Mr. Dale and Mr. Hodgkins are thoroughly alien in their outlook on existence, they don't have obsessions and stimuli like conventional humans. They may pretend to react with anger or happiness to an event, but nothing effects them emotionally, at least as far as humans understand it. Similarly, they do not experience stress checks.

Adventure Ideas

- The simplest method is for the characters to be presented with Dale and Hodgkins as standard adversaries. They are more likely to act in the service of a sorcerer or similarly supernatural foe than of their own accord, though that is not a hard-and-fast rule. They might be hired as assassins or thieves, since their time-shifting powers lend themselves particularly well to those fields. Obviously, they aren't conventional employees by any stretch of the imagination, so their employer will probably need to use magick to control or "pay" them. If Dale and Hodgkins are too strong for the characters to directly defeat, breaking their employer's power over them can provide an alternate way to stop them.
- A more unusual idea is for them to act as sponsors for the characters. Again, they are more likely to be servants of a greater power, though they might act independently. They make interesting and creepy ways to brief the players about events and missions, and their time-shifting gives them access to information that would be impossible for any normal people to find or turn up at just the right moment. For example, they could shift backwards in time to warn the characters of a fight in which they will be killed, giving them a chance to "escape their fate." Given their power and amorality, Dale and Hodgkins shouldn't really be fighting side-by-side with the characters in the trenches, but they make unnerving backers. On the one hand, their time-shifting makes them a valuable font of information. On the other, they're clearly inhuman and their motives are probably unknown.
- Rather than serving a human force, their alien nature makes them well-suited to serve godlike or infernal Powers, such as the Invisible Clergy in *Unknown Armies* or more conventional demons and deities. The fact that they appear human, yet behave in a slightly otherworldly fashion, means they make effective bridges between the mortal characters and great (or terrifying) powers beyond their comprehension.
- A more-short term use for the pair is as guardians of treasure or some powerful magick. Their improbable appearance can make for a comical encounter if the characters try to "liberate" their charge. Imagine the characters fighting their way past formidable traps and foes, finally encountering the pair who introduce themselves and offer the confused would-be thieves a pre-battle cup of tea. Heaven help a character who talks with his mouth full. This could even work in a comedy-orientated medieval game, with their obviously anachronistic nature being played for laughs. Then again, once the pair demonstrate their abilities, the characters may stop laughing abruptly . . .
- For a more investigative game, Dale and Hodgkins could be introduced through a series of clearly temporally impossible events. Imagine a party of cops trying to solve a murder committed in front of witnesses who saw nothing except that the victim was alive one second, and then dead the next. Yet the markings on the previously uninjured body show he was tortured for hours . . .
- In sci-fi games, the pair might have a more scientific explanation. Perhaps they're aliens, or experiments, or living time-travel machines. If the campaign involves time travel to a large degree, Dale and Hodgkins could make especially interesting "timestream caretakers," following the time-shifting players from place to place and time to time, smoothing out the historical paradoxes created by their actions and helping or hindering as you choose (obviously requiring an increase in their time-shifting powers above what's listed here to do this.)
- Finally, Dale and Hodgkins can be very interesting with their powers turned all the way up. Instead of the current time-shift rules, maybe they can simply stop time at will, and travel into the past and future as easily as you or I ride a bus . . . at this level, they're far too formidable to be direct foes, but they could fulfil a role of near- godlike creatures in your game, providing a cosmic humor and menace as advisors, sponsors or even prophets. After all, if they can nip 20 years into the future and nip back, they can make some interesting predictions for the characters . . .

Pyramid Review

Cthulhu Invictus: Horror Role-Playing In Ancient Rome (for *Call of Cthulhu*)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Chad Bowser, Andi Newton, & Deane P. Goodwin

Illustrated by Chad Bowser & Andi Newton

120-page tape-bound b&w book; \$20

Outside of the three core eras -- the twenties, the 1890s, and the modern day -- Chaosium's [Call of Cthulhu](#) has explored few other time periods. The scenario anthology, *Strange Aeons* was the only exception to this until the release of [Cthulhu Dark Ages](#) earlier this year. It is now followed by another of Chaosium's "Miskatonic University Library Association" Monographs, only available direct from the publisher's website. Each volume explores an idea, scenario, or setting with a view to proper publication should it prove popular. *Cthulhu Invictus* explores the existence and influence of the Cthulhu Mythos in Ancient Rome.

The year is 50 C.E. during the reign of Emperor Claudius. The Empire is prosperous, thriving, and expanding, but is also open to the venal, the corrupt, and the squamous. While mothers tell children tales of gods, of heroes, and of monsters, real horrors are abroad in the night, some unknown; others kept hidden for the Empire's safety. In Greece, Athens has been prevented from progressing for over a century, punishment for magi summoning an avatar of Yog-Sothoth. Rome's Vestal Virgins tend the Sacred Flame to keep both city and Empire safe spiritually, were it extinguished, Y'Golonoc will be set free and the city easy prey to his depraved followers. At night Hypnos, Lord of the Dreamlands, pulls the dreamers of Rome into his realm to compete in bloody and sadistic games. Merchant shipping crossing the Mediterranean is beset by attacks from Tritons and Merman. Or rather, Deep Ones. Both Bast and Nyarlathotep are active in Egypt, and cults to Shub-Niggurath are widespread, though under other names. The Cult of Cthulhu remains small, with the Elder God still slumbering in sunken R'lyeh, with worship having slowly drifted in from the East.

The Empire is home to many cults and secret societies. They include Christians, the cult of Magna Mater, Mithraism, Gnosticism, and Republicans, but perhaps the most interesting are the two dedicated to fighting the evil represented by the Mythos. Originally founded by the Greek Aristion, the "Custus Notitiae" is a closed society of 25 scholars that aim to recover any book that might damage mankind. The "Blade of Zarhost" is the second, an all-female militant branch of Zoroastrianism that emerged from Parthia to fight Sand Dwellers, Deep Ones, and other Mythos threats.

Besides the more "traditional" Mythos aspects, the authors have made an effort to work elements of the Greco-Roman mythology into the Mythos. Almost 3,000 years before the time of *Cthulhu Invictus*, a group of clerics used an artifact to steal power from the Dreamlands. They declared themselves to be Olympians, with the powers of flight and invulnerability, and were worshipped and sacrificed to. Further, they were capable of creating creatures and casting spells, summoning Dimensional Shamblers and the like. Zeus himself favored a three-headed Hound of Tindalos named Cerberus! Although Hypnos was to eventually blast the mind of most of the Olympians, they live on in legend, and so do the creatures created and associated with them. This includes Cerberus, the sea vortex Charybdis, the Cyclops, the Gorgons, Lamia, the Mother of Vampires, and the Muses.

Opposed against the Olympians were the Titans, an elite core of religious elders who engaged in vigorous scholastic studies and debate. Predating the rise of the Olympians, they employed advanced sciences to combat the Mythos-

based powers of the newly arisen gods. Although the Titans ultimately failed, again some of their creations live on. Other creatures given in the bestiary are not so heavily tied into this background, and are less interesting for it, lending themselves more to a "Swords & Sandals" style game.

The new spells follow this combination of the Greco-Roman Mythos and Cthulhu Mythos. For example, *Beseech Charon* does indeed contact the keeper of the way over the River Styx, but who just happens to be an avatar of Yog-Sothoth. Likewise, *Summon Child of the Sphinx* does call an anthropomorphic animal, meant to be an Egyptian god, to the caster; it is again another avatar, this time of Nyarlathotep. Another spell, *Augury* ties into the rules for "Roman Augury," which covers the five types used by the College of Augurs.

Before getting down to character generation, *Cthulhu Invictus*, provides a solid guide to Rome and the Empire of 50 C.E. There is enough here to play an ordinary game set in Rome, and when it is combined with our familiarity with the period, is certainly serviceable, though not spectacular.

Character generation follows the standard rules of *Call of Cthulhu*, though the occupations and skills are far closer to those of *Cthulhu Dark Ages* than found in the core rulebook. Everything is clearly explained, including the minor tweaks to combat, healing, and sanity. Combat involves more hand-to-hand encounters, thus warranting the more detailed rules for parrying. Damage is not recorded not just as points, but also wound-by-wound to reflect the less effective healing methods of the time. Armor is more readily available, but is designed to deflect damage rather than absorb it. Given the lack of therapists in Ancient Rome, Sanity is more difficult to recover, and the only reliable methods involve either rest or the grounding of the sufferer in everyday activity.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Cthulhu Invictus is supported with two scenarios, the first of which is "Morituri Te Salutamus." This opens after a day at the races, with the characters coming across the attempted abduction of a woman of Equestrian status. They receive both a reward in thwarting the kidnapping and a request to investigate both this attempt and the disappearance of a number of other women across Rome. The scenario has the feel of a traditional *Call of Cthulhu* adventure, and a playable, though not exceptional one at that.

The second scenario is "Chuma Invictus!" is more interesting in that it takes the characters beyond the border of the Empire, South of Egypt to the Kingdom of Kush. They are not investigators in the traditional sense, but legionaries, assigned as part of a trade envoy's bodyguard. In truth, the envoy has another reason to be visiting Kush -- he is a member of the Custus Notitiae tasked to obtain a Mythos tome before it falls into the wrong hands. The journey involves a trip up the Nile, punctuated by ambushes by bandits and crocodiles, before reaching the capital of Kush, where a game of cat and mouse ensues. Its climax is again traditional and involves surprisingly bad weather. Again, not a spectacular adventure, but perhaps more interesting for the players than the first. This is in part due to "Chuma Invictus!" feeling very much like a convention scenario, as opposed to the more introductory nature of "Morituri Te Salutamus." The two scenarios are separate, but with a little effort, either could be run after the other.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Physically, *Cthulhu Invictus* is clean and tidily presented, certainly in Chaosium's later printings of the book. As with other Monographs, the publisher's desire to get something to print has meant that the first run of each Monograph has not been as best presented as the authors would wish. Either version of this Monograph is very lightly illustrated with just two decent pieces, which are all that relevant to the text. The maps though, are rather rough, and while the one of Rome is serviceable enough, the ones of the Empire and its provinces vary between the plainest of window dressing and providing the broadest of geographical detail.

Unfortunately, the real problem with *Cthulhu Invictus* is one that it shares with *Cthulhu Dark Ages*: the lack of Keeper advice on running a Mytho-influenced campaign, here obviously set in Ancient Rome. The feeling is that the Keeper is expected to get by knowing about both, rather than being given an examination of the point where they meet. Certainly, familiarity with both is an excellent starting point, but if *Cthulhu Invictus* is ever to become a properly published and distributed supplement, it desperately needs such an exploration. It is also a pity that both scenarios choose only to explore minor Mythos threats rather than delving into the possibilities suggested by Hypnos'

influence in Rome or the punishment of Athens.

Cthulhu Invictus does actually contain one good concept -- the Olympians as Mythos-fueled beings. This suggests a campaign all by itself, set in a Heroic Age where the Greek legends all have a truth. The combination of [Cthulhu d20](#) and Green Ronin's ***Trojan War*** supplement, with a dash of [Mutants & Masterminds](#) would a fine starting point for such a campaign, along with a copy of ***The Complete Dreamlands***.

Initially, ***Cthulhu Invictus*** is disappointing, but upon closer examination, it shows a fair bit of promise. In conjunction with the ***Call of Cthulhu*** rulebook, it certainly provides the Keeper with the basics necessary to play. That said, it leaves much unexplored, and hopefully this will be addressed, along with proper Keeper advice, should the supplement be developed into a full supplement. In the meantime, this is a solid primer on exploring the Mythos in Ancient Rome.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Easy Come -- Easy Go

Published by [Out of the Box Publishing](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Illustrated by John Kovalic

Boxed, full-color rules, dice cup, four specialty six-sided dice, nine prize cards, \$12.99

Another year, another marketing cycle, another Out of the Box game, another chance for them to break their winning streak so the reviews don't look like they're biased in the company's favor. Is *Easy Come -- Easy Go* a loser at last? Eh . . . not really.

The object of the game is to gain three prizes and hold them until the beginning of your next turn. There are nine such fabulous prizes to be won, and players do this with die rolls. The game comes with four special dice -- six-siders, but the one has been replaced with a zero (which counts as an even number in this game). On your turn, you roll all four dice. Looking at the results, you decide which results you'll keep and which you'll reroll. You must keep at least one of the dice that come up each time, but the rest you may continue to pitch.

The results hopefully correspond to the formula on one of the prizes. The fleet of cars, for example, asks that you come up with four of a kind, while the private jet requires exactly 13 on the dice. Some are a little more particular, like the tiaras that need three of a kind *and* all four dice must show even numbers. Since you're not likely to come up with such a result the first time out (though it's hardly impossible), deciding which dice to keep and with which you'll dispense becomes an exercise in critical judgment.

And no prize is safe, either. If someone else rolls the required dice results on one of the prizes you've already won, well . . . the game is called *Easy Come -- Easy Go* for a reason. They can now take that matching prize away from its erstwhile owner and add it to their own pile. Some of the rewards are easier to take than others -- getting a 17 or higher isn't too tough -- so you can go the path of least resistance on a couple of things in hopes of a quick or easy win. Conversely, it's easier to relieve you of such items. If you get your third prize one turn and can hold all three until the beginning of your next turn, you're the winner, off to see exotic locations wearing all that glitzy jewelry. Two to four people can play, and a game takes about five minutes. (In theory more could join but the prizes would be spread awfully thin and the game could take forever.)

John Kovalic is once again foregoing food and sleep to helm someone's illustration duties. He cleverly matches the item pictures to the required rolls -- for two pairs you get two butlers and two maids as your prize, and getting a seven scores the "Lucky 7" yacht.

The production quality is first class. Much like Out of the Box's tendency toward putting out nothing but snazzy games, that splendor can be somewhat irritating. The game includes a felt-lined cup for shaking up the dice -- very nice, but hardly necessary for the rolling process. That "perceived value" the marketing pros talk about is part of the problem. The set can do without such trappings, and yet it seems absurd to chastise the creators for making games so blessedly simple and straightforward that they find themselves straddling a financial fence where excluding such items would make the game almost non-existent. Truthfully the game could probably be summed up on the website and folks at home could create their own set, but it wouldn't seem as much fun.

Aside from the cup, the components include some dice and the prize cards. The dice are unremarkable beyond the one-

zero tradeoff. The cards aren't for shuffling -- you just lay them out for players to see and collect -- so they could be made of just about anything. As it is, they're thick and full -- really thick. The things are more like refrigerator magnets than playing cards. The pieces all come stuffed into one of those custom-molded plastic trays.

And yes, *Easy Come* -- *Easy Go* is very much like *Yahtzee*. The price tag on this short-box game has gone up a whopping three bucks, so when one weighs all these factors, saying it's not worth the cost may be fair comment. Then again, the game's speed, the replay value for eager players ("*This time . . .*"), the lack of extensive game sheets to fill out, and the tradeoff of elements (strategy is simpler, but there are fewer mental calisthenics overall and you want those neat cards) means even when riffing on old ideas, the Out of the Box team makes game design look easy.

--Andy Vetromile

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



And When I Die, And When I'm Gone . . .

This week, of course, saw the passing of noted and widely respected late night television host Johnny Carson. And, like the passing of many celebrities, his death has received a lot of news and blog commentary. Although I enjoyed much of the material I saw him in, I'm not what I would call a "fan"; I respected what he did, but always felt that he was aimed at the generation before mine. (I've heard others say his most cutting-edge and edgy shows came about before he moved the show to Hollywood. That was a year before I was born, and over a decade before I would've been allowed to stay up late enough to watch him. And even when I was watching, I was just as likely to catch David Letterman.

This isn't to speak ill of the dead; I admire the heck out of everything he did, especially with how *easy* he made it seem. David Letterman always looks like he's uneasy and struggling, which in turn makes me uneasy while watching. But not Carson. I always got the impression that the stage could've caught fire, cyborgs might've burst in, and the guest he's interviewing would rip off a mask to reveal himself to be the Red Skull, and he could handle it with a wink, a smirk, and a commercial break.

But, despite the fact we're 25% of the way through this column, I contend this week's installment is not about the inimitable Mr. Carson's death.

Rather, I've been reading others' reactions to his passing with some fascination and amazement. Unlike other recent deaths I've read about (such as [Julius Schwartz](#)), I don't have the overwhelming attachment to Johnny Carson that others do, which enables me to be a bit more analytical.

And the conclusion I'm reaching – which I've reached before but I don't think I've expressed until now – is that people like reminiscing about the dead. It gives a sense of comfort and an organized means of sorting through feelings about the demised.

It also enables people to use the departed to make points about their own lives -- usually by tying the past to the present. Thus Ronald Reagan's demise several months ago resulted in much discussion about the 1980s, the Cold War, the revitalization of the Republican Party, the unifying nature of his leadership, and so on. And, invariably, both political parties began trying to use Reagan's legacy to illustrate their own points.

While it's possible to view this as cynical exploitation, I'm more inclined to ascribe more noble goals. Primarily, I think it's really hard to feel like you're contributing to the communal aspect of grief without adding something to the "dialog." Thus, rather than having:

Person 1: Boy, it's really sad he's dead.

Person 2: Yes, it's really sad.

Person 1: Yep. Really, really sad.

. . . the desire to keep this communication going can cause us to use the deceased as a catalyst:

Person 1: Boy, it's really sad he's dead. Person 2: Yes, it's really sad. Of course, he would want us to keep living.

Person 1: That's true; he was always more about enabling people to advance their own lives, rather than using them to advance himself.

And so on.

From there it's not a far cry to be using a high-profile deceased person to talk about bipartisanship, free trade, and Social Security reform.

To use an example, many people are citing the fact that Johnny Carson died of emphysema, and are blaming his "untimely" death on the fact he smoked (and, in all likelihood, continued to smoke up until his death). While smoking

no doubt contributed to his condition, it's hard to view someone who lived four years longer than the national average as necessarily having died untimely. Coming from a family whose members have a 50-50 chance of collecting that first Social Security check, I think I'd be delighted if I got to 78. (Of course, the other half of that 50-50 chance means I might be ravaged by stroke or Alzheimer's, so maybe "delighted" is a strong word.) While I'm no fan of smoking by any stretch of the imagination, it seems like a stretch to lay Carson's demise entirely at the feet of cigarettes.

How does this tendency relate to gaming? Well, in most long-running RPGs there will probably be, at some point, at least one significant death. Many players have characters which are famous, either in the circle of the character-type community or to the game world at large. Yet, with the sole exception of some extended LARPs I've been in, I've never seen this tendency to speak of the dead ever appear in any campaigns I've played in, either to "grieve" or to make a point.

Admittedly my personal sample size of one is too small to draw any definitive conclusions, but that's never stopped me before.

I suspect there are ____ primary reasons this tendency isn't used more:

"It's hard to miss you when you won't go away." Since deceased characters were played by other players, who are – presumably – still in the group, it can be very difficult not to metagame any drifting from what the character would have "really" wanted:

Fred: I knew Kate, and Kate would have sided with me on the dimensional vortex issue.

Kate's Old Player: No she wouldn't've!

Fred: Yeah, but you don't know that . . .

Even a hint of this can go a long way toward poisoning the use of former characters. However, if everyone can resist the temptation to comment when others are speaking about a former PC, the storytelling and plot possibilities can still be utilized.

"Sad, sad, really sad . . ." Obviously, there's a huge difference between reacting to the death of a real person and a fictional one; the emotions are, presumably, much more detached with the latter than the former. (I'd argue this is probably a good thing, people often game to avoid the misery and hardship of the real world, and bringing to mind the thousand natural shocks flesh is heir to is probably beyond the pale for most gamers.) Nevertheless, it's still possible to *pretend* about that depth of emotion; it's possible to roleplay being in love with an NPC without playing footsie with the GM.

"You! I thought you were *dead*!" Finally, in many games it's common for PCs not to remain dead. I've written about this [before](#); suffice it to say, a revolving-door afterlife is a temptation that should be avoided. At the very least, if death is often transient, it can be useful to metagame a bit to let the gaming group know that, yes, this character is well-and-truly, never-coming-back dead. And then *never* backtrack on this point. Bucky and Barry Allen ain't comin' back.

Death is a natural consequence of life, and grief and contemplation is a natural extension of death. These stylized reflections, in fact, help set us apart from animals.

And, as a bit of utterly non-gaming advice, I reiterate the need to let those who touch your lives know of their contributions to you, while you can be sure they know and understand. Because sometimes even the most serious and heartfelt conversations can seem as simple and comfortable as a late-night chat with a friend on a couch.

--Steven Marsh

Demented and Sad, But Social: Social Characters for Antisocial Players

Part II

by Matt Riggsby

Part I of this article appeared [last week](#). This has been an introduction.

Seduction

Seduction is a thorny issue. We'll be discussing something fairly narrow here, the difficult task of romantically and/or sexually interesting someone who, for whatever reason, shouldn't be considering a relationship with you (for example, someone who is married, under vows of celibacy, or betrothed to someone else), rather than the larger and even more difficult task of establishing and maintaining a real romantic relationship. We'll also be discussing it in terms of getting into someone's head and heart, not necessarily into their bed.

Physical acts have wildly different personal and cultural implications; scoring with a hippie Woodstock is an entirely different matter from getting there with a priest or the Sultan's shy, virginal daughter. Since this article is about "getting things done," a far more important thing to consider is emotional impact. You may not get the prim Victorian maiden to surrender her virtue, but if you get her sufficiently interested, you may get her to surrender the keys to the family fortune.

One of the reasons this is so difficult is that it's very personal. Most people have any number of friends and business partners, but few lovers and spouses. The reasons for choosing the partners they do go beyond rational self-interest and the constraints of culture into the deepest parts of individual psychology, which are far beyond the scope of this article. However, we can discuss trends.

Obviously, some things are almost universally terribly useful if you want to seduce someone. Physical attractiveness would go without saying if it weren't for the fact that what constitutes "attractive" varies somewhat between societies. Facial scars which would be considered disfiguring in our society would be considered dashing on men in parts of Africa (or, for that matter, among German duelists in previous centuries), while descriptions of ideal feminine beauty in many past societies would appear downright stout in modern Hollywood. If your character moves between societies, the value of his personal appearance may change, so it's doubly important to dress and groom appropriately.

Wealth and power are also useful; being able to shower your intended with gifts, provide fine meals and entertainment, and so on certainly can't hurt, even if it isn't always appropriate to offer them. However, if your character intends to seduce someone as a means to an end, he's probably not likely to be on the rich-and-powerful end of the spectrum, so we'll pass over that.

Particular skills and professions can be tangentially useful. Most societies have professions that are considered glamorous, and being successful in them will be generally attractive. Becoming a famous duelist or warrior may be beyond your character's abilities, but artistic skills, as we've mentioned, can be remarkably attractive and more safely achieved. Less glamorous but possibly more useful, clergy and psychological counselors, who are taken into peoples' trust as a matter of course, sometimes have to fend off the romantic attentions of those who come to them for counsel (we'll pass over the profound moral and legal implications of a PC intentionally using a position of trust as a stepping-stone for seduction; if you're trying to seduce someone against their better judgment, you've probably left such

concerns behind).

One recurring theme in both literary and real-world seductions is providing the seducee with something they don't have. If your intended lacks romantic and sexual excitement in general, a physically attractive potential partner may be all they need, but you'll usually need more. What makes you interesting, though, depends very much on your intended's personal interests, and at least partially sharing them (or appearing to) can be useful. For example, if your intended is an ardent conservationist, becoming involved in conservation movements or being (or at least posing as) an environmental scientist will give you both a reason to spend time together and an opportunity to share intense emotional experiences, which will make it that much easier to form a bond.

A bit more subtly, people in long-term relationships can get bored or lonely. Husbands complain of nagging wives and wives complain of unsympathetic husbands. With an unappealing home life, providing a sympathetic ear is itself a good first step. You, the seducer, can provide an outlet for the frustrations that your intended builds up in their domestic life. By sympathetic listening, you can bring your intended to trust and rely on you emotionally, bringing you that much closer to your goal, gently guiding a search for "something better."

Another approach to take is to present your potential seducee with a project, someone who can be "fixed." Any number of women become involved with "bad boys," otherwise appealing men who are in some way out of control or emotionally damaged. Some enjoy an excuse to join in and misbehave without actually making it a way of life, while others believe that this tortured but actually sensitive soul can be healed if given the right love and attention. But it's not just women falling for that sort of thing. Something appealing to some men is a vulnerable but, again, otherwise appealing woman whom the man can take under his wing, as it were.

The difficult part (one of them, anyway) is knowing which approach to take. Does the person you intend to seduce have a weakness for exotic foreigners? A boring home life? A passionate political agenda? You can do some research beforehand, of course, but this may be an area where (if your game system supports them) you might rely on your PC's social skill and ability scores. If your imagination initially fails you, you might ask your GM to throw some dice at the problem and see if your character can figure out what approaches seem likely to work. Once you've got that, you can get down to work.

Bribery

Bribery is a little like tipping for service: expected in some places, forbidden in others, with local rules of etiquette that nobody ever discusses. In some societies, bribery is hard to define. Making payments or giving gifts to officials has been, in some societies, an expected part of doing business. The line between paying fees and paying for influence was, therefore, a fuzzy one. Nevertheless, there were usually laws and sometimes secret police to ensure that officials didn't extort exceptional bribes. In exceptionally corrupt areas, officials are very up-front about the bribes they expect, making it simply a matter of haggling. Elsewhere, though, you'll have to act like you're not actually offering a bribe (or, if you're on the other side, like you're not actually accepting one).

The first question is how much to offer. The amount depends on how much the official you're bribing usually makes, how much he thinks you can afford, and how valuable his service appears to be to you. For routine services (allowing a border crossing, letting you off on a traffic violation), initially offer the equivalent of no more than a day's pay for an average person in the society in question. If you're clearly from a richer place than the official, negotiation may turn that into something more like a day's pay for an average person in *your* society. Prices will also go up considerably if you're rude, appear to be very wealthy or in a hurry, or if there's something suspicious about you (trying to cross a border with clearly forged papers, pulled over for speeding with blood

Girl, You Must Be Jamaican . . .

A word about pickup lines is in order here. Movies and TV (bad movies and TV, anyway) are full of clueless men trying out pickup lines: hopefully clever, possibly sexy one-liners which, they hope, will make them irresistibly attractive. They don't, of course. They're barely extended greetings, not magical incantations. However, it's worth paying attention to why the idea exists in the first place. The functional purpose of pickup lines, along with other attention-getting ploys like sleight-of-hand magic, bar bets, and so on, is to give you a moment of favorable attention

dripping from your trunk), so it pays to be calm, polite, and credible. If you aren't, the price will rise, and it may make the official you're dealing with hesitate to take a bribe from you at all.

The second question is how to offer it. Unless a bribe has already been explicitly demanded of you, it's very bad form to hand the official a wad of money and say "Here is a bribe!" It's best to dress the act up in an official process. You might ask if there are any fees or fines you should pay on the spot, allowing you to hand over your money under the pretense that it's an official charge, not a private payment, or you might slip some money into your ID papers which you'd be handing over to the official anyway. In less official settings (for example, bribing a maitre d' or a hotel doorman), you may have to resort to such clumsy dodges as dropping money on the ground and suggesting that he dropped it, surreptitiously putting it on his desk while talking about something else, or simply handing it over. However, the less overt you can be about it and the more distance you can put between your handing over the money and him taking it, the better.

during which you can say something more substantive (at the very least, introducing yourself). A clever line is like a knock on the door: Someone is likely to answer, but you have to say something far more convincing after that for them to let you in.

Some other tips:

- If there's a group to bribe, find the leader or most senior member and bribe him. Ultimately, he's the one making the decisions, so he'll want his cut. If you bribe a junior officer, he'll have to talk his superiors into going along, which will require additional bribes.
- A bribe doesn't have to be cash. Any valuable goods and services can be used. If you're well enough established, you can even work on "credit" or as a broker of favors. For example, you might observe that the receptionist's portable radio is rather old and suggest that she visit your friend the electronics dealer who can set her up with a replacement. It's a bit less convincing than cash, but it's a bit less obviously a bribe, and if she has reason to believe that you're good for it, the veiled promise of free merchandise is nearly as good as money.
- When dealing with cash exchanges, try to conceal how much wealth you have. If the people you're trying to bribe see your pouch full of gold, they'll want more than if you've only got a handful of silver. You might keep a small batch of money (or several small batches) on hand for bribes while keeping a larger bankroll elsewhere.

Negotiation I: Diplomacy

There's a story (which may even be true) about a Victorian-era British diplomat sent to chastise the king of a small foreign realm and make him give up his territorial ambitions. To show the flag, a fearsome warship was sent with him with orders to take up station conspicuously off the coast of the capital city. However, if the king did not give in to the diplomat's demands, the ship's captain was instructed to withdraw; war with the distant land would be too expensive and unpopular at home. On meeting with the king, the diplomat transmitted Her Majesty's government's message that it would make Britain very happy if he were to stop threatening his neighbors. The king, his attention irresistibly drawn to the warship, asked what would happen if he did not. Without going into specifics, the diplomat said that, sadly, that the captain would be "forced to carry out the second part of his instructions." The king, needless to say, capitulated.

That, in a way, is part of the essence of diplomacy. Contrary to what we might want to think, diplomacy is very rarely about lying. Political and diplomatic relationships are usually long-term (individual diplomats come and go, but their countries will live on), and telling outright lies will do serious damage to your credibility. If the British had made it a policy to explicitly threaten naval bombardment, sooner or later someone would call their bluff and, once the truth came out, it would be a far less impressive threat. Instead, negotiation involves careful management of the truth. Although they seem like modern concepts, elements of spin-doctoring and plausible deniability have surfaced through history.

This is not to say that lying doesn't have its place. Small, polite lies are common ("No, your grace, that cassock doesn't make your butt look big."). Large lies can be used against parties whom you plan to eliminate entirely ("We only want peace, Mr. Chamberlain."), although at that point it's not diplomacy; it's a con game. Mostly, however, you'll want to give people those parts of the truth they want or expect to hear, and gently lead them to fill in what you want them to

think.

Like haggling, diplomacy is a matter of persistence without alienating the parties you're negotiating with. However, power relationships become much more prominent. In general, you want to appear firm and to be dealing from a position of strength, even if you're dealing with a relatively friendly negotiating partner. Even if you aren't in a superior position, act like you are: Come to the table with a full set of demands which are well in excess of what you're willing to settle for so that you have points to concede. Concede no point without argument (or at least discussion). State your position as frequently and fully as possible. However, be aware that you can do this in any number of moods. You could attempt to be harsh and distant, emotionally neutral but sincere, friendly but firm, and so on, as is appropriate to your personality (and that of the parties you're negotiating with).

One tactic often used in particularly contentious negotiations is quibbling over protocol: stated agenda, timing and location of negotiations, number of people present during talks, the shape of the table, etc. Many such points may be trivial in the long run, but forcing the other side to make concessions on *any* point gives the winner a psychological edge over the loser, and may allow him to slip some substantive points past the other side. This sort of posturing is also common when third parties are observing the situation. For example, when negotiating a peace treaty with a rival, you might choose between meeting at a neutral location in a third country to impress your own people that you won't let those filthy foreigners set foot on your sacred soil or holding negotiations in your own capital to stress to other governments that your country is an important one and a center for diplomacy.

At the same time, though, don't just try to obstruct proceedings. It's well and good if things are going your way, but if you're facing a competent diplomat unwilling to defer to you and you're *too* insistent on getting your own way, you won't be able to make any kind of deals and will eventually walk away empty-handed. Subtle queues may indicate that your negotiating partners are tiring and may withdraw or rethink previous concessions and deals. If you can sense that point approaching (this may be another point for the GM to roll some dice), find lesser points you can concede. In difficult negotiations, it's often useful to start with small agreements as trust-building exercises and slowly work your way up to major issues rather than trying to deal with the intractable situations first and clean up the side issues later.

Negotiation II: Politics

Every government and organization has a political process. Even in a theoretically absolute monarchy, officials in the middle are capable of giving unpleasant tasks low priority or performing them poorly, and the people at the bottom are capable of going on strike or even actively revolting (an act which probably won't overthrow their oppressors but will cost them time and resources). And there are always local decisions to be made about how to implement quite possibly vaguely worded or insufficiently funded commands from above or moves among the less powerful to persuade their superiors to a particular course of action. So even if there's no legal framework in place, there is often a practical need to convince at least some people to go along with things (and, for you, an opportunity to get people to do things for you).

Building a Diplomat

Diplomacy has only become a profession in the last few centuries. For most of history, it has been something done by people who usually do something else, which is something to keep in mind while making up a diplomat character. For example, many Medieval diplomats were wandering friars and priests, whose missionary work carried them to (or was, at least, a pretext for) their travels to other countries, so you may want theological or preaching skills. Merchants and heralds were sometimes pressed into service, which implies other skill sets. A surprising amount of high-level Medieval and Renaissance diplomacy was carried out by female relatives of rulers, a consequence of interlocking familial relationships. The king of X could hardly be seen traveling to negotiate with the king of Y, but his wife or sister could always go to see her cousin, who happened to be the king of Y's wife or sister; rather than thinking of your diplomat as a high-born nobleman, you might want to think of the character as a high-born noblewoman.

One other thing that bears specific mention is diplomatic immunity. There are examples of extreme legal protection for diplomats and other important messengers through history. However, those examples have tended to be the exception rather than the rule. In fact, killing the messenger was often a way for one ruler to express

Being involved in politics has a private aspect and a public one. The private aspect is essentially an ongoing process of diplomatic negotiation. Although not as long-term as relationships between nations, relationships between politicians go beyond a single moment, so people in office must be capable of dealing with one another with a certain amount of guarded trust. Despite how it may sometimes appear, few real politicians are actually inflexible ideologues, and those that are will often employ advisors and lieutenants who aren't, so if you've got some political standing yourself, you should be able to find someone to negotiate with.

The public aspect has to do with maintaining the support of constituents and underlings farther away from the heart of the decision-making process. When their words are considered carefully, politicians tend to blatantly lie less often than they equivocate, develop positions over time, and make statements so qualified as to be nearly meaningless. They do so in a way that makes it sound like they're making a definite statement, but they're actually leaving themselves a way out. Rather than making concrete promises or setting out timetables that can be used against you later, you can express hopes, intentions, and personal good will. If the risks and benefits of an action by the organization are vague, which is often the case, people are more likely to act according to their opinion of the person taking a given position rather than the position itself.

One way of thinking about how to gain and manipulate power is to think of a society as being made up of competing factions. A skillful politician will often cultivate influence not by uniting those factions into a single body, which is a tremendous task, but rather increasing his support among different factions by picking issues specific to each and emphasizing his stand on them to that constituency. A candidate for office might emphasize his support for controls on agricultural imports in conservative rural areas and emphasize a liberal social policy among urban sophisticates. The farmers might disagree with his policy on, say, group marriage, while the brie-and-chardonnay crowd might distrust his tendency towards protectionism and isolationism, but if the candidate leads with those parts of his policies which, in isolation, his audience wants to hear, they'll be more interested in hearing about that than his full platform.

A common way of attacking a politician, then, is to draw out those aspects of his statements and record which, again in isolation, could be interpreted in a negative light. Since just about every political decision involves some kind of tradeoff, this isn't very hard. For example, if a candidate consistently supports tax increases to support schools, an opponent could accuse him of recklessly increasing taxes. If he consistently opposes such proposals, an opponent could accuse him of voting to deprive children of education. If he supports some but not others, an opponent could accuse him of being unreliable and not someone to trust with decisions concerning (depending on the audience) taxes or children. Supporting war means financial waste and killing citizens while opposing it means cowardice, supporting construction means destroying the environment while opposing it means strangling industry and causing unemployment, and so on. Any candidate for office can be demonized; it's just a question of figuring out what any given audience will find most alarming.

Ultimately, though, this is a strategic choice rather than the one way of doing things. A sufficiently charismatic politician or one in a society with a few ready-made large factions might instead choose to build up enthusiastic support in a single group to whom he has strong appeal rather than lukewarm support from a broad base. This might not be viable in a large nation, but it can be in individual provinces, cities, or other relatively small areas, and it can make that politician a key person for other politicians to influence.

Some other tips:

his extreme displeasure. Being an official messenger will give your character's words a certain authority, but it also puts your character at greater risk of having his head sent home in a box.

Up the Organization

Finding assistants and advisors to leaders who are willing to listen to you is just generally a useful thing to do whether you intend political manipulation or not. Large organizations are a boon to socially-oriented characters. For characters who match force with force, a bigger organization means that many more resources that can be turned against them. For a social character, it means that many more possible weak links in the chain.

The ability to talk about nothing, already an important skill for social people, is doubly so for politicians. The ability to appear a pleasant fellow is often more useful for casual contacts than winning an intellectual argument.

- In conversation with people you don't know well, avoid discussing hot-button issues such as sex, religion, and, contradictory as it may seem, politics, unless you know their stance on a particular topic. A single sharp disagreement can undo a great deal of general good will.
- A common political tactic, if you're expecting a brief conversation, is to make a prepared statement whether it's called for or not. In order to push their message home, politicians may go to extraordinary lengths to link the topic under discussion with what they say. Watch, for example, legislators on TV news shows and see how often, in response to a question, they say something like "I think the real question is . . ." and talk about something different.

Interrogation

The word "interrogation" conjures up visions of cops questioning a scruffy prisoner in a back room of a police station. Although that's the main focus of this section, we'll use it in a broader sense of someone trying to get information out of someone who might not want to provide it: an intelligence officer getting troop information from POWs, a reporter investigating government corruption, or an auditor trying to find an embezzler.

The best way to gather information is simply to ask direct questions. Unless the subject of the interrogation has some reason not to talk to you, he's likely to answer. However, in most situations that PCs will find themselves, the subjects will be unwilling to talk, so they'll have to find a way to trick or cajole the information out of them.

A straightforward way of dealing with the problem is by bargaining: If you give me information, I can give you something you want (money, information in return, favors for you or friends). Although it's a simple approach, it's not necessarily the best. Scrupulous people may be unwilling to be bribed into revealing information, while unscrupulous ones may be willing to tell interrogators what they want to hear rather than the truth. It's better, therefore, to convince the subject that providing accurate information is in his best interests. Several approaches involve playing directly on the interrogatee's emotions. For example:

- **Love and Compassion:** If you give me information, it will help others (it will keep your family safe from retribution, it will save someone else's life).
- **Fear:** Give me information or something terrible will happen (you'll be punished, a disaster will hurt you or your family).
- **Revenge:** If you give me information, it will hurt people who have wronged you (oppressive rulers, competitors, co-conspirators who will let you take the fall).
- **Ego:** What you've done is really impressive and I'd love to know how you've done it, or perhaps you must be terribly important to know things like that.

A bit like seduction, the trick is to figure out which approach will work. In some cases, there are fairly obvious avenues. For example, an investigative reporter is likely to play up the revenge angle while interviewing a corrupt organization's cast-off employees, but tell the guilty middle manager how he can help repair the damage he has done and try stroking the ego of the proud leader. For other cases, it may not be so obvious, so if possible, you might spend some time investigating the people you intend to interrogate in order to determine their state of mind.

Approaching a question indirectly can be useful, hiding your true intentions from your subject so that he doesn't know not to cover something up, or at least approaching an uncomfortable fact from a direction the subject hasn't come up with a cover story for. For example, rather than asking a suspect "Where were you when your business partner was killed?", a detective might, under the guise of checking routine information, ask an increasingly detailed series of questions about the suspect's whereabouts during that day: Where were you between seven and eight? What were you doing at such-and-such a time? If you were watching TV, what was on? What happened during that episode? If the suspect is lying about his whereabouts, he'll be forced to improvise a more and more elaborate lie. With any luck, he'll eventually contradict himself or make a false statement that can be independently checked.

You can always combine approaches: one interrogator can appeal to the subject's nobler impulses, another can scare

the subject (the classic good cop/bad cop scenario), yet another appealing to the subject's ego, and so on.

This is another area where persistence and attention to detail often pays off. The best thing you can do is to get the subject of the interrogation talking as much as possible, giving him enough rope to hang himself as it were. Record conversations if the technology is available; if not, try to have other people listening and taking notes. The more hints and contradictions you can find, the better your position.

Do try to keep the information you provide the subject of the interrogation to a minimum. The less he knows about how much you do or don't know, the more he'll have to guess about what to lie about, and therefore the better your chance of catching him in a lie.

Ask about information you already have. The classic example is a detective showing a suspect the picture of a victim who they can already link with the suspect (through photographs, DNA evidence, etc.) and asking if he recognizes the person in the picture. If the suspect says no, the detective will already have a known lie to use against him.

As with bargaining, there may be subtle, unconscious physical signals when the interogatee is lying or if you're getting close to an uncomfortable truth. For example, blushing, touching the face, or no longer making eye contact can (but don't necessarily) indicate that your subject is trying to hide something. This is another case where the GM may want to throw dice at the question.

Subjecting your interogatee to physical hardship can break down his resistance, but actual torture is a questionable means of getting information. It may loosen tongues, but it doesn't necessarily produce useful answers. Rather, it can produce answers that the subject thinks the interrogator wants to hear. Someone being tortured is more likely to confess to doing things he didn't do and make up details just to make the ordeal end; lie detectors and physical cues are unlikely to work here as well because the subject desperately wants any lies he tells to be true, so any physical reactions to lying are overridden by panic and response to pain.

Summing Up

So if you're a socially oriented character, what do you do while your combat-monster friends are polishing their guns? Here are some things to keep you busy:

- **Meet and greet:** While your comrades are renting rooms at the inn and stocking up on fresh power cells and mandrake root, you can talk to the bartender, the shopkeepers, and anyone else you meet to get a handle on local conditions. Start with the people you meet and work your way up the chain to people you'd like to know.
- **Background check:** While other characters are working on a task, you're the one who can find out what your employer isn't telling you. If your group is hired for a simple, lucrative job, you can investigate your employer and the task at hand to figure out why you're getting overpaid instead of being unpleasantly surprised at the end.
- **Take out the opposition:** Once you've scoped out your opposition, you can think about taking action. This may mean using the social contacts you've already made to get in touch with potential allies or figure out your enemy's weaknesses. It might also mean going to your opposition and seeing if you can't turn them into an ally, or at least a neutral party.
- **Misdirect:** If you're receiving unwelcome attention, you may be in the best position to get rid of it. If you're leaving town, make it sound like you're staying. If you're planning to attack one person or group, make it sound like you're attacking someone else, or even no one at all. If you've already scoped out your opposition, you should be able to find some third parties to pin those activities on.

The Other Side of the Spotlight

Eventually, PCs are likely to end up being questioned rather than doing the questioning. Since most interrogation techniques are designed to get you talking, the best thing to do, really, is to stonewall. It's hard for a socially oriented character but, as much as possible, keep your mouth shut. If you must talk, don't bother lying about things which can be verified: when you made phone calls, old relationships, purchases, and anything else that's likely to be witnessed or to leave an electronic record. If possible, find out what the people questioning you know, but be aware that they're likely to lie to you directly.

- **Buy low, sell high:** Even if you don't have any skills directly related to buying and selling, you should probably be involved in any kind of monetary dealings your group gets into. If there's somebody with better merchant skills than yours, you can still work to win the customer's good will, setting him up for a more favorable deal in the end.

Works of Interest

- *How To Win Friends and Influence People*: Written primarily from the point of view of salesmanship, the pointers in Dale Carnegie's chestnut can be used as general social advice.
- *Ridicule*: This French film is an instructively cruel illustration of social competition.
- *Kama Sutra*: Find a full translation and skip over the parts about sexual technique. It contains chapters on how to carry on an illicit affair and what personal attributes are desirable in a lover.
- *The Prince*: Like Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, this is one of those works that is just too useful to go away. Although written for life-long monarchs rather than elected officials, anyone in a position of authority can get good advice on rulership from Niccolo Machiavelli's remarkable work.
- *Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister*: Margaret Thatcher characterized these 1980's BBC sitcoms as being an unfortunately accurate representation of how government works. Looking past the satirical content, there are some remarkably useful pointers on how to operate in a political system.
- *Homicide: Life on the Street*: Perhaps the most realistic police show ever (not that that's saying much) with fascinating interrogation scenes, although the detectives have a cinematic ability to figure out which approach to interrogation will work with suspects.
- *US Army Field Manual 34-52*: The Army's guide to gathering human intelligence in the field. Available [on-line](#) from various sources.

Six Heroes For The Age Of Napoleon

For *GURPS*

By Mark Gellis

These six characters are designed with *GURPS Age of Napoleon* in mind, and can be used for campaigns set during the American Revolution, the French Revolution, or the wars of the early 19th century. They can also, with a few changes, be used in virtually any other campaign set during either the Swashbucklers or Victorian/Steampunk periods, where travel is managed by sail and horse, but where black powder, and perhaps even machines powered by steam, are everyday tools rather than sorcery. And, of course, a fair number of the Infinite Worlds are variations on Earth's Age of Napoleon.

The characters have been designed so that they complement one another, making them suitable for an "adventuring group." However, there is enough redundancy of skills that they need not all be included in the party if there are only a couple of players who need new characters.

How the characters actually come to be a party is left to the GM, but they have been designed with the assumption that they are currently somehow at loose ends and seeking employment. Perhaps they are all staying at the same inn and become acquainted in that manner, and then stumble into an adventure together. Or perhaps some patron has assembled them as a team to complete some mission. The GM is free to decide.

David Macleod

David Macleod grew up in a small fishing village near Aberdeen. When he turned 18, he decided to leave his village and make his fortune as a merchant seaman. He has spent nearly 20 years sailing around the world and has now returned to England, looking for new opportunity and adventure.

Like many Scots, David is proud of his country and his heritage, and saddened by its reduced status in the Union. (If the campaign is set during the American Revolution, he would have been just old enough to remember the Forty-Five; even if the campaign is set in the Regency, David is likely to know people whose fathers and grandfathers fought with Bonnie Prince Charlie.) Even so, he accepts what has happened. There are plenty of opportunities for Scots in the British Empire who are willing to not dwell on the past.

David is an honest and good-natured fellow, who is not afraid of hard work or hard conditions. He is an expert seaman, and a competent carpenter and fisherman, and he is well-versed in the lore of the sea, but his real value to a group of adventurers is that he is quite deadly in a fight. As a merchant seaman, he has faced privateers, pirates, and tavern brawls, and has lived to tell a very respectable share of tales.

5'10" 175 lbs.

Late thirties. Blonde hair with a short trimmed reddish blonde beard and blue eyes.

ST 11 [10] **DX** 13 [60] **IQ** 11 [20] **HT** 11 [10]

HP 11 [0]; **BL** 24 [0]; **Will** 11 [0]; **Per** 11 [0]; **FP** 11 [0]; **Basic Speed** 6 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: Scots Gaelic (native) [0]; English (accented) [4]*; French (broken, spoken only) [1]

*Speaks with a noticeable brogue and a tendency to use Scottish idioms, spelling conventions, etc. With some English,

this will give him a -1 reaction penalty.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]

Disadvantages: Phobia (Reptiles, 12-) [-10]; Truthfulness [-5]

Quirks: Loves to tell a good yarn [-1]; Proud to be a Scot [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Seaports of the World)-12 [2]; Artillery (Cannon)-12 [4]; Boating (Sailboat)-12 [1]; Brawling-14 [2]; Carpentry-12 [2]; Crewman (Seamanship)-14 [8]; First Aid-12 [2]; Fishing-12 [2]; Gunner (Cannon)-13 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-14 [2]; Literature (Tales, Songs, and Lore of the Sea)-12 [4]*; Knife-14 [2]; Leadership-12 [4]; Navigation (Sea)-12 [4]; Public Speaking (Storytelling)-12 [2]*; Riding (Horse)-12 [1]; Shortsword-14 [4]

* These skills use the Optional Specialization rules

Total Points: 150

Jacob Smithfield

Jacob Smithfield is a quiet Canadian who has lived on the frontier most of his life, exploring, serving as a scout for the British army, and so on. He has come to England to visit some old friends, and see about the possibility of getting some manuscripts published, and is presently at loose ends.

He is a simple man, capable, quietly efficient, and not very talkative; like the stoic Indians he has lived and worked with for many years, he simply does things instead of talking about it. He has always been a meticulous note-taker, measurer, etc., however, and now he wants to tell others what he knows, especially because writing books about strange and faraway lands is a very good way to make money in the Age of Napoleon.

Some of his adventures have been rather harrowing. On one expedition, he and the men with him were captured and tortured by Indians. Smithfield was able to effect an escape, but he was injured so badly that later on his left arm had to be amputated. To this day, he suffers from nightmares in which he relives watching his comrades tortured and killed. He has sworn to himself that he will never again willingly allow anything like that to happen to anyone with whom he is working.

His injury has, of course, limited his ability as a fighter, but he has taken this in stride and focused on those fighting skills he can use. He is a very good shot with a pistol and also quite dangerous with the Indian tomahawk (and enjoys how intimidating this is to most Europeans, especially those who may have underestimated him because of his injury).

He likes the comforts and pleasures of civilization (he is especially fond of the theater, and London is one of the great centers of the dramatic arts). He is, however, quite willing to be employed on new missions of exploration, or other endeavors where his knowledge of surviving in the wilderness can be put to good use.

5'10" 160 lbs.

Early thirties. Brown hair and brown eyes.

ST 10 [0] **DX** 12 [40] **IQ** 12 [40] **HT** 12 [20]

HP 10 [0]; **BL** 20 [0]; **Will** 12 [0]; **Per** 14 [10]; **FP** 12 [0]; **Basic Speed** 6 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]; Native American [1]

Languages: English (native) [0]; Algonquin (accented, spoken only) [2]; French (native) [6]; Huron (accented, spoken only) [2]; Ojibwa (accented, spoken only) [2]; Ottawa (accented, spoken only) [2]

Advantages: Fit [5]

Disadvantages: Nightmares (12-) [-5]; One Arm [-20]; Sense of Duty (Explorers, adventurers, etc. with whom he has worked or with whom he is working) [-5]

Quirks: A little shy with women, but will sometimes say romantic things to them in languages he thinks they do not understand when he thinks they will not hear him [-1]; Likes stage drama [-1]; Loves the kind of brisk, not-quite-winter day that makes most people wish they were indoors [-1]; Quiet [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Canada)-12 [1]; Axe/Mace-13 [4]; Boating (Unpowered)-12 [2]; Cartography-13 [4]; First Aid-13 [2]; Fishing-14 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-14 [4]; Hiking-12 [2]; Leadership-13 [4]; Mathematics (Surveying)-12 [4]; Merchant-12 [2]; Naturalist-12 [4]; Navigation (Land)-12 [2]; Riding (Horse)-12 [2]; Stealth-13 [4]; Survival (Woodlands)-14 [2]; Thrown Weapon (Axe/Mace)-14 [4]; Traps-12 [2]; Writing-13 [4]

Total Points: 150

Rose Clairmont

The daughter of a well-to-do goldsmith, Rose married a young country squire when she was quite young, swept off her feet by his charms and his good looks. She learned very quickly that her husband, while not a scoundrel, was most certainly a fool. If she had not been a competent businesswoman, and strong enough to keep his love of gambling and expensive parties under control, they would have certainly been ruined.

Her husband died in a riding accident only a few years after their marriage. Rose has not re-married, partly because she enjoys the freedom of being a young, attractive, and fairly wealthy widow, but also because she genuinely loved her husband, even if he was a fool, and is not yet ready to give her heart to someone else.

Before coming to London, Rose toured the British isles, including Ireland, staying in such places as Plymouth, York, and Bristol, and as a result has a good general knowledge of the entire kingdom.

Rose offers a group of adventurers someone who has both social and business skills. She can mingle with people, gather information, even seduce an unwary fop and use him to gain advantages other player characters would be unable to gain. She also knows quite a bit about jewels and jewelry-making, which might come in handy in a wide variety of adventures. She is a capable shot, and so she is not useless in a fight, but this is not where her strengths lie.

5'3" 125 lbs.

Late twenties. Blonde hair and green eyes.

ST 8 [-20] **DX** 11 [20] **IQ** 13 [60] **HT** 11 [10]

HP 8 [0]; **BL** 13 [0]; **Will** 13 [0]; **Per** 13 [0]; **FP** 11 [0]; **Basic Speed** 5.5 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native); French (accented) [4]

Advantages: Beautiful [12]; Status 1 [5]; Wealthy [20]; Independent Income 5 (\$1,250 per month, more than enough to support her at Status 1) [5]

Disadvantages: Overconfidence [-5]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Social Stigma (Second Class Citizen) [-5]

Quirks: Affects an educated tone in conversation [-1]; Dislikes being needlessly protected, dismissed because she is a woman, or otherwise subjected to "the general well-meaning stupidity of the male sex" [-1]; Likes to travel and visit new places [-1]; Loves the works of Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson [-1]; Misses her husband, despite the fact

she was well aware of his many faults [-1]

Skills: Accounting-13 [4]; Acting-14 [4]; Administration-12 [1]; Area Knowledge (Great Britain)-13 [1]; Connoisseur (Jewelry)-14 [4]; Cooking-12 [1]; Current Affairs (Great Britain)-13 [1]; Dancing-12 [4]; Diplomacy-13 [4]; Finance-11 [1]; Gambling-12 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-13 [4]; Hidden Lore (Jewelry)-13 [2]; Holdout-13 [2]; Housekeeping-13 [1]; Knife-11 [1]; Literature-12 [2]; Merchant-14 [4]; Observation-13 [2]; Riding (Horse)-12 [4]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-13 [1]; Sewing-12 [2]; Sex Appeal-13 [8]

Total Points: 150

Edward Lynchfield

Edward used to be a house master at an English public school, responsible for teaching languages, history, and literature. Fluent in three languages, and with near fluency in a number of others, highly knowledgeable in both history and literature, and with a natural panache that made him popular with students, he was quite successful as a teacher.

Unfortunately, he was not quite so successful in resisting certain temptations. He had to leave his position under the cloud of scandal. He does not talk about that much, except if he has been drinking, and even then he will usually only say that if one is going to seduce the married daughter of one's headmaster, one should do so when her husband is out of the country. Now, he makes a living as a translator and historical researcher in London; he hopes that someday he will be able to return to academic life, but the time being he simply wants steady work that lets him use his talents and pays well.

Edward is the typical roleplaying scholar. If a group of adventurers need something researched or translated, it is likely that Edward is the man who can manage it for them. Like Rose, he is not a combat-oriented character, but if he has to fight, he is a fair shot with a pistol. In addition, his charisma and his social skills would make him useful as an investigator. Furthermore, because his study of history has led to a study of strategy and tactics; if a party ever needs to plan a battle, Edward would be able to give them an edge over many opponents. Finally, during his studies he has learned quite a bit about the occult. In campaigns where magic does not exist, his knowledge of legends and myths will help him tell interesting stories; in campaigns where it does, what he knows about the monsters that stalk the shadows of the world may well mean the difference between success and death for the party.

5'9" 165 lbs.

Late thirties. Thinning brown hair and brown eyes.

ST 10 [0] **DX** 11 [20] **IQ** 14 [80] **HT** 10 [0]

HP 10 [0]; **BL** 20 [0]; **Will** 14 [0]; **Per** 14 [0]; **FP** 10 [0]; **Basic Speed** 5.25 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]; Ancient Greek (accented) [4]; Arabic (accented) [4]; French (native) [6]; German (accented) [4] Italian (accented) [4]; Latin (native) [6]

Advantages: Charisma 2 [10]

Disadvantages: Lecherousness (12-) [-15]

Quirks: Chatty drunk [-1]; Hopes to someday return to academic life [-1]; Religious skeptic [-1]

Skills: Acting-13 [1], Area Knowledge (London)-14 [1]; Diplomacy-13 [2]; Games (Chess)-14 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-12 [2], History (England)-13 [2]; History (18th Century Military)-12 [1]; History (Roman Empire)-13 [2]; History (Roman Republic)-12 [1]; Literature-13 [2]; Occultism-13 [1]; Public Speaking-13 [1]; Research-14 [2]; Riding (Horse)-11 [2]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-14 [1]; Strategy (Land)-13 [2]; Tactics-13 [2]; Teaching-14 [2]; Theology

Total Points: 150

William "The Whisper" Holkins

William Holkins grew up in the slums of London. Although he is fairly intelligent, he never had the inclination to learn a trade (although he did learn something about masonry because his father was a bricklayer and there was not really any way to avoid it without being beaten on a regular basis). He realized when he was an adolescent, watching his honest father work hard and die poor, that learning a trade meant working long hours to make someone else rich. He decided that it was better to work short hours and make himself rich.

Since then, he has made a good living as a pickpocket, smuggler, thief, and housebreaker. His particular talent is being able to follow people quietly so he can learn what he needs to learn about them before making his move. He can virtually disappear into the shadows and it has earned him the nickname "The Whisper."

He has not gotten rich being a thief, but he not gotten caught, either. Yet. And he remains hopeful. He has done some big jobs, enough to live in relative comfort for a man of his low status, and he knows other big things are out there. He wants them, and he is willing to take whatever risks he has to take to make his fortune.

In the Age of Napoleon, when even petty theft could be punished with hanging (even later on, it often meant transportation to Australia), career criminals were mostly either skilled or dead. William is skilled, but he is also something else. He is lucky. When things go wrong for other people, he always seems to manage that critical task.

William is, of course, a character who gives the party access to the underworld and a stealthy investigator who can also steal, follow, break into buildings, and search them effectively. He also knows all kinds of legends and secrets about the city of London. However, unless one is looking for comedy (and most likely disaster), he is probably not the best choice if the party needs someone to mingle with and gather information from anyone who is not also a criminal. (A good way to get him into an upper class house is to simply claim he is someone's servant. He is not particularly good at being a servant, but he is capable of carrying bags, polishing boots, running errands, and the like, and he can fast-talk his way out of most difficulties if he does not have to do it for too long. If the person pretending to be his employer is pressed on the issue, he or she can always say something like, "His father was a loyal servant for many years and so I just don't have the heart to dismiss him.")

5'6" 150 lbs.

Late twenties. Brown hair and brown eyes.

ST 10 [0] **DX** 13 [60] **IQ** 12 [40] **HT** 9 [-10]

HP 10 [0]; **BL** 20 [0]; **Will** 11 [0]; **Per** 12 [0]; **FP** 9 [0]; **Basic Speed** 5.5 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

History Specialties

While this will probably be a point of debate for some time, your humble author takes the position that, despite its rich and complex history, England, because it is a section of a clearly identified large region (i.e., Europe, see **Basic Set**, p. 200), qualifies as a "small nation." Thus, it only requires one specialty of History. In fact, the phrase "broad geographical region" suggests that only the largest and most populous nations, such as America and China, need more than one specialty of History. History (England) does not cover the history of various British colonies; for these, one should generally use the history of nation itself, such as History (Australia) or History (Canada). The Roman civilization covered a much larger area than England, and thus requires more than one History specialty. However, to avoid a needless proliferation of skills, it seemed reasonable to simply divide the history of Rome into its two major periods, the Republic and the Empire. GMs concerned that particular specialties of History are too broad can always rely on the guidelines provided for Area Knowledge skills (see **Basic Set**, p. 176) to determine appropriate modifiers for specific questions.

Languages: English (native) [0]

Advantages: Reputation 2 (Among thieves, Recognized 10-) [3]; Luck [15]

Disadvantages: Extra Sleep 1 [-2]; Greed (12-) [-15]; Status -1 [-5]; Unattractive [-4]

Quirks: Likes gin [-1]; Only steals from people who "deserve it" (usually, this means someone who treats ordinary people like dirt, whom he will then stalk until he has the opportunity to rob them, but sometimes includes anyone who is simply so stupid or trusting that he cannot resist taking advantage of them) [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (London)-12 [1]; Brawling-13 [1]; Climbing-13 [2]; Fast-Talk-13 [4]; Filch-13 [2]; Forced Entry-14 [2]; Gambling-12 [2]; Guns (Pistol)-13 [1]; Hidden Lore (Legends of London)-12 [2]; Holdout-13 [4]; Knife-14 [2]; Lockpicking-14 [8]; Masonry-12 [1]; Observation-13 [4]; Pickpocket-13 [4]; Search-14 [8]; Shadowing-14 [8]; Smuggling-12 [2]; Stealth-14 [4]; Streetwise-13 [4]; Urban Survival-13 [4]

Total Points: 150

Eric Davenshire

A handsome young man and the son of a wealthy landowner in the Midlands, Eric Davenshire has made a career out of having a good time. He is not unintelligent, but he tends to see everything as a bit of a lark. When the going gets tough, he can be relied on, but unless the situation is serious, he sees no reason why he should be. In part, this is because he is secretly afraid that he is not very good at being serious, and that if he tried to be, he would simply disappoint people. It is this, however, that might inspire him to join a team of adventurers, solving mysteries and righting wrongs; this would strike him the kind of endeavor where he can do something serious, something important, something that his family would be proud of, without having to give up his life of pleasure.

Eric is another character who can be used as an investigator. With his good looks, social connections, and charming personality, he can often get invited to places and parties that would be inaccessible to others. He also knows a lot about what is going on in the city of London, and his knowledge will make him valuable in terms of finding clues. While he is not as dangerous in combat as some of the other characters, he is a capable enough shot and swordsman.

The bane of Eric's existence is his cousin Robert. Robert is not nearly so successful socially as Eric, but he is hardworking and honest and he dislikes his cousin, whom he sees as frivolous and an embarrassment to the family. Whenever he gets a chance, he will try to frustrate those plans of Eric that he sees as foolish, selfish, or likely to make the family look bad. (If the party leaves the London area, one may assume that Robert might also show up or that Eric manages to offend some other serious and self-important fellow.)

Eric has the disadvantage that he is impulsive and that he refuses to treat things seriously until they are very serious indeed; he really is the kind of fellow who will rush in where angels fear to tread. Of course, that is the reason why he sometimes saves the day when the angels among us would have gone down to their deaths praying for a miracle.

5'8" 175 lbs.

Late twenties. Reddish blonde hair and large, blue eyes.

ST 10 [0] **DX** 11 [20] **IQ** 12 [40] **HT** 11 [10]

HP 10 [0]; **BL** 20 [0]; **Will** 12 [0]; **Per** 12 [0]; **FP** 11 [0]; **Basic Speed** 5.5 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]; French (accented) [4]; Latin (broken) [2]

Advantages: Attractive [4]; Fashion Sense [5]; Independent Income (family sends an allowance, \$3,000 per month,

enough to cover his cost of living at Status 2) [12]; Status 2 [10]; Wealthy [20]

Disadvantages: Compulsive Carousing (12-) [-5]; Code of Honor (Gentleman) [-10]; Enemy (Cousin Robert, As Powerful, Rival, 9-) [-5]; Gluttony (12-) [-5]; Impulsiveness (12-) [-10]

Quirks: Flirtatious [-1]; Loves to try new foods, especially foreign dishes [-1]; Reacts to stressful or dangerous situations with sarcasm and witty remarks [-1]; Sometimes fearful that he is a disappointment to his family (and hopes he will figure out a way to make them proud of him) [-1]

Skills: Acting-13 [4]; Area Knowledge (London)-13 [2]; Carousing-14 [8]; Current Affairs (London)-13 [2]; Dancing-12 [4]; Diplomacy-12 [4]; Fast-Talk-13 [4]; Gambling-13 [4]; Guns (Pistol)-13 [4]; Fencing (Smallsword)-13 [8]; Riding (Horse)-13 [8]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-13 [2]; Sex Appeal-13 [8]

Total Points: 150

All This, And Adventure Seeds, Too

So, what can one do with these characters?

Quite apart from simply dropping them into an existing campaign when they are needed, which is what they were initially designed for, here are three adventure seeds a GM may use to develop a campaign using these characters.

- Loch Ness is not the only place in Scotland haunted by monsters. On the Isle of Skye, something is stalking the lonely seashores near the towns of Uig and Portree. For the last several months, following the nights of the full moon, mutilated bodies have been found on the beaches. Locals think that something has come out of the sea to punish the wicked for their sins. What is behind these deaths? Is it some maniac, so depraved that he rends the bodies of his victims like a wild beast, or is it something worse?
- There are rumors that a Canadian secret society is trying to seize control of the colony. No one knows who they are, although their members are believed to be some of the most wealthy and powerful men in Canada. There are even rumors that they have learned the secrets of Indian magic from a shaman and are using this sorcery to bring ruin to their enemies. Naturally, most Europeans dismiss the magic of the North American Indians as the superstitions of half-naked savages, but a number of leading Canadians have met with violent and mysterious deaths or accidents in the last several months. What is the truth behind these tragedies? And is dark magic or simply dark conspiracy involved?
- In the days of the English Civil War, a large emerald pendant disappeared from the home of one of the leaders of the Cavaliers. According to the story, a maid was tricked into stealing it, thinking that the thief loved her; instead, he murdered her and took the jewel for himself. Now, more than a century later, a pendant very much like it has been seen worn around the neck of a young lady from a noble and wealthy family, recently married to a gentleman with a title, a fortune, and a bad reputation. Anyone looking into the matter will learn that three other women in the same family have owned the pendant, and all have met with tragedy. Is it the same pendant stolen in the Civil War? Is there a curse? Does the ghost of the murdered servant haunt those who dare to wear the jewelry she purchased with her life? And is the newest owner of the emerald pendant now in danger, and is it from her jewelry or from her husband?

Mer-Children of Cain

by Elizabeth McCoy

It is said that the "half humans," the "fish-kin," are of the race of Cain, who slew his brother and was condemned to roam the world, never to have a home as he traveled about the land, and that the land that drank his brother's blood would never again bear fruit for him. However, to guard against his being slain, the Lord placed a mark upon Cain.

The first son of Cain, Enoch, and his children, stayed in the city that bore Enoch's name, in the land of Nod. However, Cain could not remain, and his wife traveled with him. In time, he and his vagabond family reached the sea, and there Cain realized there was a place that was not the earth.

First, the legend says, they took to boats. But, angry at the intrusion of humans, the great Leviathan tried to destroy them. Cain cried, "Who kills Cain shall be avenged sevenfold," and the great beast prayed to the Lord for mercy, that the drowning humans' death would not be laid upon its doorstep.

And so the Mark upon Cain and his family changed them, and though he would never again return to his homeland, under the waves he found he would no longer be condemned to wander, and the waters and undersea plants would give him and his family food. Finally, Cain praised the Lord, and vowed that he would never again slay his kin. As the Lord had saved them by giving them the gifts of the fish, so would he and his line spare the gentle schools. But as they were not kin to the death-eyed shark without scales, the many-tentacled octopus, armored shrimp and crabs, or the shelled oysters and clams, those were safe to eat.

--Mer creation story

* * *

Mer-folk are as legends have depicted them: human above the waist, and scaled tail below. They have a horizontal fluke, though, like a dolphin, and no gills -- their lungs process water just as efficiently as air, and vice versa, with almost no transition time.

A male mer is a mer-man. A female, a mer-maid. The singular and plural is, simply, "mer." Females are frequently a little less strong than males, with a lighter build, but the dimorphism between sexes is small enough that there is no penalty to ST. Pregnancy and childbirth are easier than for humans, and maternal mortality is low -- which is fortunate, as the dangers of the sea claim many children.

Mer are streamlined for swimming, with narrow shoulders and sleek, seal-like hair. Only a very inactive mer can grow his or her hair long, though there are representations in ancient mer cities that suggest nobility did this -- just as long fingernails denoted wealth and status in China. Mer lower anatomy is dolphin-like. Female mer (mer-maids) have small bosoms, save when they are nursing. Baby mer are as likely to be fraternal twins as singletons, with triplets and identical twins about as rare as with humans.

The mer consider themselves kin to scaled fish and air-breathing dolphins, both, and will not kill either for food. (There is theological debate about whether orca and the whales are kin to dolphins, and therefore not for consumption, or if they are safe to be hunted.) Seaweeds and other plants that grow in the ocean are also on the menu, as are birds.

Because they can withstand crushing pressures and do not *need* to breathe air, mer can build great underwater cities far from where human ships can find them. Still, if they go too deep, it becomes dark and gloomy to them, and the hunters who seek out the delicacies of seabird meat must make long, dangerous journeys.

Thus, mer cities are often near reefs or islands, to provide landmarks and opportunities to hunt animals above the waves. Good sunning-rocks are a beneficial side effect. They do not even attempt to farm on islands, whether humans live there or not; for the most part, this is because they are awkward on land. Only the strongest of them can drag their

lower bodies around on their tails, and flip the tails to help propel them on the ground. Between that and their lack of knowledge about growing things above-ground, it's just easier to eat sea-plants.

What histories the mer have indicate that they were, for the most part, a peaceful people who respected life and nature. Unfortunately, this is not always the case now.

* * *

If you do not return, we shall slay your children, a hundred each day, said the angels. And Lilith replied: The Lord has given me dominion over children, the boys until they are a week of age and the girls until they are three weeks, though if they are shielded by an amulet bearing your names, I will spare them.

And as the fish-kin are only half human, I may do as I please until the boys are five years of age, and the girls sixteen.

As all she spoke was true, the angels Sanvi, Sansanvi, and Semangelaf left her by the Red Sea with her demon lovers. Because humans are the chosen of God, the angels told the human prophets how to protect their children. But because the fish-men were only half human, the angels left it to the humans to warn their half-kin.

But they did not do that for a generation, so the sea folk's numbers dwindled, save those who gave themselves to Samael's service, and those who worshipped the Lord and were saved.

--A Legend of the Mer

* * *

Whatever the reason -- and the legends they have for this are varied, with even the most popular full of contradictions with their origin-stories -- modern-day mer-folk are much more scarce than they once were, and divided into two ideological groups. One strives to follow their culture's prior peaceful ways. The other . . . does not.

The peace-loving mer make their homes either in the darkest seas, hidden away from all humans and their violent kin, or near the shore, allied with humans. They adopt the local human customs and religion, and do everything they can to live in harmony. They're perfectly willing to trade goods -- coral, seabirds, seashell jewelry, etc. -- for bounty from the land, but do tend to insist that fish and dolphins are not for eating. They will also, if necessary, fight to defend their homes from outsiders. (If the local humans seek to drive them out, they leave, sadly. The towns who co-exist with mer-folk say that this is bad luck.)

* * *

When the herder Abel made his sacrifice of a lamb, the Lord looked upon it with favor. Cain, a farmer, sought to give what he found worthy -- and was spurned. When he slew his brother as a sacrifice, he was sent to the ocean, that he and his kin would live when the Flood came; thus did the Lord reward his sacrifice of blood. Only sacrifices of meat are pleasing in the eyes of the Lord; farmers till the land only so that they may feed the animals whose pyres will send sweet smoke to the Lord's home.

--A Midrash of the Pirate Mer, in particular the Orca's Teeth lineage

* * *

The more violent mer . . . have turned pirate. Some have hidden ports in the deep sea or on reefs and islands, while others are purely nomadic. Both types build "ships" to hold loot and prisoners for sacrifices. Their preferred sacrifices are humans, but "prey" mer-folk and fish or dolphins are also in danger. Perhaps ironically, many of them view orcas as more kin to them than dolphins.

They do not sacrifice plant matter of any sort, nor anything that wasn't alive to start with. If they have nothing else, they cut their own flesh and drip blood onto a flame. Many of them claim to be honoring God by this; obviously, their

detractors believe the pirate clans worship quite a different Being.

Pirate mer-folk in nomadic bands number around twenty to fifty adult fighters. The ones who have a safe harbor to build a city can grow to as much as one or two hundred strong, and there are always stories about deep-water cities where hundreds or thousands of Satain-worshipping mer swim and sacrifice in the darkness, only coming to the surface to capture ships and drag them under.

Pirate mer's ships are mostly raft-like frameworks with sails that they can use to ferry them faster than they can swim. They rarely have the mass to mount any sort of catapult or cannon, though some have storage for crossbows or black powder weapons, and "seats" for the pirate mer to aim from. Sometimes the seats are even shielded, like a duck-blind - and since they're accessible from underneath, it's hard to tell if there's a mer in there until it shoots out.

The nomadic bands also attach long ropes to at least one ship (depending on how many they have), which lead to net-like structures deep underwater, called "webbing" or "water-rigging." Very pregnant and nursing mer-maids, children too young to fight, and wounded or aged mer-men cling onto these when the ships are in motion. What few possessions the clan has are also tied to the webbing.

If a fight goes bad, the non-combatants can simply dive down from the webbing. They're far enough under the surface to have a good head start.

A favored mer-pirate tactic is to engage a ship, latch onto it with grappling hooks, and then chop out its bottom from underneath. Barnacles and mer-defenses make that a risky endeavor, but it's usually easier than setting the thing on fire. A few brawny mer make rope-ladder grapples -- a clumsy, ineffective, short-ranged invention -- and use them to attempt to swarm up, grab a crewman, and "kick" off with their tails, bearing their hapless victim with them into the water.

Naturally, anyone in the water is at a distinct disadvantage compared to a mer.

Pirate mer are not *always* religiously minded. Some clans are simply allied with pirates and have -- like their peaceful kin -- adopted their customs. (And it's a wise pirate leader who makes an alliance with mer. When the patrol ships, enemy pirates, or privateers show up for the bounty, tame mer can sneak up under them and send them to the bottom. Worst comes to worst, make sure your tame mer have part-underwater caves, and they'll help you hide out. Take care of your mer, and you mer'll take care of you.) These mer want pretty jewelry, the interesting things from the land, and to impress mer of the appropriate gender.

Still, if you see a mer-ship's sail, the way to bet is that they don't care about the cargo. They want sacrifices and are willing to try to sink the whole ship to get them. Since they're not always picky, some ships will carry condemned criminals, slaves, or other low-life whose only purpose is to stay alive long enough to be thrown to the mer. Crews in a panic have also been known to pitch pariahs overboard, and some brave captains (or crew) have deliberately jumped or set off in a dingy to distract the pirate mer with easier prey.

Burnt offerings are difficult for mer to achieve, but they do their best. If necessary, flint, steel, and a small raft can be set aflame. If they don't have the wood for that, they must haul their victim to a reef or island, and perform the sacrifice there. About the best thing that can be said about a mer sacrifice is that it's usually a quick cutting of the throat, and not burning alive.

GURPS Third Edition Mer Racial Template

20 points

Advantages: Cast Iron Stomach [15]; Enhanced Move (Swimming) [10]; Flexibility (Lower Body Only, -50%) [8]; Gills* [10]; Nictating Membrane 1 [10]; Pressure Support [15]; Speak Underwater [8]; Temperature Tolerance 2** [4].

Disadvantages: Aquatic*** [-40]; Chummy [-5]; Mer-type (see below) [-16].

Racial Skills: Swimming-DX [1]

Taboo Traits: Agriculture (Land)

* They do not actually have gills; this is merely the name of the Third Edition advantage.

** They are comfortable in a range from around 7 degrees Fahrenheit, up to about 97 degrees Fahrenheit. This is not a centered comfort range -- their comfort zone is in the high 30s to low 50s, but they can function without extra clothing down to around 28 degrees Fahrenheit.

***Eventually, if entirely deprived of water, a mer will sicken and die; they could qualify for a Dependency (Water, monthly, -5 points) in some situations. However, they are unlikely to have *quite* as quick a decline as that disadvantage suggests. GMs may add this disadvantage if they wish, bringing their total down to 15 points.

Types

Pacifistic mer have Pacifism: Self-Defense Only [-15]. They have the Quirk that they will not eat, or condone killing save in self-defense or mercy, dolphins or scaled fish.

Pirate mer have a Code of Honor akin to the Pirate's Code of Honor (p. B31), but including a drive to sacrifice burnt offerings of some kind. The frequency of this varies from clan to clan. Some try to make a sacrifice, if only of fish or other living creatures, weekly. Others perform the rituals monthly, and are more insistent on non-aquatic prey, such as humans or large land-animals. And, of course, there are stories of islands full of prisoners, awaiting an annual grand orgy of slaughter. The total for this Code of Honor is 15 points. Most pirate mer also have a Quirk that these sacrifices are religiously necessary.

Settings

As presented above, mer are approximately Tech Level 4-5 -- black powder weapons and wooden ships, and can be regressed easily. (Ironclad ships would put quite a crimp in piratical lifestyles, but immersed or half-immersed submarines crewed by mer might be . . . interesting.) They also have a religious background suitable for not-very-alternate Earthly timelines (just add mer-folk). Magery or psionics can be added if the Game Master desires. Some specific setting ideas include:

Yrth

The world of the forthcoming ***GURPS Banestorm*** for *Fourth Edition*, this fantasy/alternate timeline world has Earthly religions, magic, and many different races. Ocean travel is relatively neglected on Yrth in many areas, which could leave room for flourishing isolationist mer cultures (both bloodthirsty and pacifistic), as well as colonies around the coasts and islands. Many mer would be Christians (the piratical ones being a rather variant "Christian") or Muslims, but a large minority of the pacifistic ones would identify as Jewish.

Swashbuckling!

Tall ships, pirates, privateers, lost underwater cities . . . mer-men chopping holes in the ship, requiring brave swashbucklers to dive into the brine, daggers in their teeth, and battle the foul villains! Or perhaps the mer themselves are doing swashbuckling, hired to ride upon special platforms on the outside of the ship and confront their criminal kin! If you can climb the rigging and grab a rope, surely you can repel boarders with a giant fish-tail smack to the face!

Space

The mer live on a water-world, full of islands. However, they speak a language derived from Hebrew, claimed they were washed to their home by the Biblical Flood, and are not surprised by how humans look. Deep-sunk cities have

wall-paintings and records that might show more, but their exact location is lost and they are in the hands of the piratical tribes . . . Archeologists and theologians both are anxious to learn about the mysterious past of the mer.

Horror

The mer do not properly name a child until it is five years old (if a boy) or sixteen (if a girl), and try to protect them with shell amulets etched with the names of angels. Sometimes a child just vanishes and never returns, and all that is left is the amulet on the seafloor. But in one settlement, the religion of the mer has fallen into "disuse." Blank-eyed children, unprotected by amulets, swim away from adults and leave grieving parents. Player characters must decide if it's sharks, pirates stealing sacrifices or recruits, or something more sinister that draws the young mer away.

Magic: Little Mer-maid

The 15-year-old daughter of a pirate mer-king has fallen in love with a land-prince, and has swum away to find a way to be with her two-legged infatuation. Her bodyguards must protect her -- even from herself. Soft-hearted villagers (human or mer) may want to help her. Two-leggers of ill-repute may be hired to kidnap her one true love down to the sea. Witches will be consulted. Will she sell her soul, and his, to give him a tail and be with her forever?

In Nomine

Mer are most likely to be ethereal spirits (5-7 Forces), with a Far Marches Domain and a secret (or re-awakened) Tether into the deep sea. Some hope only to remain hidden. Others want to gain the favor of Beleth, Princess of Nightmares. And some from both sides want human mates, that mer might once again swim the sea -- as human as any human in the Symphony.

Alternatively, perhaps some mer tribes live deep in the ocean, corporeal descendants of ethereal spirits, most likely, but can you be sure? (Give these a normal spread of human-level Forces.) They are hidden where only Jordi's Seraphim might notice them -- and as the mer live in harmony with nature would Jordi mind? Or would he think them an improvement? Alas, one has been spotted on the cameras of a deep-sea diving robot -- and as if that weren't bad enough, a small faction of mer want to go to the surface and learn about the world of air that makes such marvelous things . . .

Pyramid Review

Cause & Cure (for Ars Magica)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Michael Geller & John Kasab

Cover by Alexis Liosatos

Illustrations & Cartography by J. Scott Reeves

72-page perfect bound softback; \$17.95

*Editor's note: Although **Pyramid** is dedicated to attacking SPOILERS within its reviews with a puma-like ferocity, the very nature of an adventure review presents problems. If you think you might be playing in this adventure, don't read this review. If you're trying to figure out whether or not to buy this adventure for someone else to run for you, you might be able to get the information you need from the last paragraph. Fnord.*

Cause & Cure is an adventure developed for the Fourth Edition of **Ars Magica** (and released before the recent Fifth Edition). Designed for experienced characters, this is an adventure that will be enjoyed by players who like both roleplaying and puzzles. It can also include and involve any of the character types that go to form a troupe, not just the magi, but also the companion and the grog. All have their place in **Cause & Cure**, for its core set-up reduces the differences between the characters. Thus in a normal game or situation, where the differences in power and the application of such power are sharply delineated, the emphasis in this scenario is upon puzzle solving, investigating a mysterious situation, and above all, character and roleplaying.

The situation in **Cause & Cure** is simple. The troupe finds themselves in a mysterious castle from which they cannot find an easy means to escape or exit. The place has an ethereal quality to it, with the only other inhabitants being a number of overly helpful servants, and a vague, almost ghost-like scholar of House Jerbiton. To escape, the troupe must thoroughly explore their surroundings. There are clues aplenty if they can interpret the symbols around them, many of which also hint at the personalities and histories of the player characters.

To get the characters into this situation in a bottle, the GM is given several options. First is to have asked to locate the aforementioned though missing scholar, the second is to accept the invitation to visit this scholar or another, both of whom are fascinated with the theological and philosophical questions regarding the nature of life, death, and the afterlife. They can also be lured with promises of reward -- the chance to visit the library of the corresponding scholar, or in return for discovering the whereabouts of the missing one. Either method requires long lead in times, making **Cause & Cure** suitable for use with long-running campaigns. Alternatively, the GM can just play god and dump the characters in the bottle. This is also possible if they wander too close to the location of the castle and attract the attention of the person behind it all. A final option is more immediate and more interesting, in that the players randomly swap characters, awakening to find themselves without memories of who they are.

In fact, the person behind it all is the Lady Aldona, a powerful magical being who, being immortal, is fascinated by the human concepts of death and the afterlife. Having spent time studying both, she wants to examine them more closely and in an environment more suited to her researches. To this end she has created a laboratory, the Misty Palace, and it is here that the characters will awaken. No longer are they in "Mythic Europe," but in the Realm of Magic beyond the

Land of the Dead, something they are unlikely to deduce, although the ghostly state of their scholarly friend might be an indication.

What the Lady Aldona is studying is the reactions of the characters to the situation they are in, and their very human desire to stave off the inevitable. In order to escape the Misty Castle, the troupe must explore their surroundings and solve the conundrums presented in its four surrounding towers, each named for one of the apostles. Both magical and mundane methods can aid in the process, though not necessarily in the deduction. The key to getting out of this locked box is in knowledge of medieval medical understanding and practice. To that end, a nine-page appendix covers the subject in more than enough detail for the adventure as well as beyond it. A one-page handout also covers the subject in brief.

The GM does have some work upon his part, as much of the adventure has to be tailored exactly to the player characters and their histories. In particular he will have to interpret and represent them through medieval and Christian symbolism. This process may prove a challenge to some, and although some advice is given, both more advice *and* some references would have helped.

If the troupe can escape and acquit themselves well, Lady Aldona will be more than generous in rewarding them. Not only can she gift them with tomes to study for the learned and ordinary goods for the mundane or unlearned, and even minor magical items. There is also the possibility of characters gaining beneficial virtues and losing non-beneficial ones. The possibilities of using the setting beyond the adventure are also discussed, since the Lady Aldona wishes to continue her studies. One idea if the players are possessed of a malicious streak, is for them to direct their characters' enemies into Lady Aldona's trap!

Physically ***Cause and Cure*** is a nicely put together book, in particular, the use of blurred images is pleasingly effective. Where in other books it distracts from the factual content, here it works because of the very nature of the scenario's location and ethereal ambiance.

As a scenario, ***Cause and Cure*** is the type that will infuriate the less cerebrally inclined players, who will suffer frustrations aplenty. To others, ***Cause & Cure*** is something to relish, presenting a fascinating series of challenges and roleplaying situations. That the scenario is also relatively easy to slip into a campaign is a bonus. It would also be possible to adapt it to another system -- Green Ronin Publishing's [Medieval Player's Manual](#) would be an aid in this, if for example, the GM wanted to use the adventure under the **d20 System**. Otherwise, this is an excellent adventure for ***Ars Magica***, one that explores both the medicine and symbolism of the medieval period, both in play and presentation.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

The Algernon Files (for *Mutants & Masterminds*)

Published by [BlackWyrms Games](#)

Written by Aaron Sullivan, Dave Mattingly, Leigh Brandon, & Ryan Wolfe

Edited by Dave Mattingly

Art by Derrick Thomas, Eric Rademaker, Ryan Wolfe, Brad Parnell

128-page b&w hardcover; \$24.95

There's good news, bad news, and great news. The bad news is that we're getting yet another collection of super-people for use with a superhero RPG. The good news is someone else is putting it out -- it's not the original company feeling they have to do this to keep up with everyone else who's doing a super-game of their own. The great news? The book itself. *The Algernon Files* is a terrific piece of work.

BlackWyrms Games' book falls under the auspices of the M&M Superlink, marrying it to the *Mutants & Masterminds* RPG. The eponymous Algernon is the artificially intelligent computer personality that oversees Fortress, Doc Steel's headquarters, though the book makes little attempt to present the files as if they were given from the AI's perspective (this turns out to be a good thing).

The book is divided into sections, with heroes at the front and villains at the back, many subdivided into teams, independents, etc. Steel is the leader of the Sentinels, the latest incarnation of a superteam that has gone through changes as the United States' fortunes have risen and fallen. He's the son of the original Doc Steel, and while his team has some fairly stock superfolks -- a speedster, a mage, a brick -- they aren't a Justice League clone. This entry also introduces us to the first of the book's many dandy maps and schematics. The artist lays out Fortress using a simple, uncluttered look that can be taken in at a glance. The team's vehicles are written up like the base, using the *Mutants & Masterminds* system.

Other groups include the quasi-military patriots know as the Arsenal, America's go-to supergroup; the Covenant, a collection of magicians and mystics who have been knocking around since the Middle Ages; and the Aerie, a whole brood of heroes plugged into an aerial theme. The rest of the allies are unaffiliated, like Horus, the human host who fights against the newly risen agents of Apophis, or the publicly beloved Best Man. The absolute drop-dead coolest character -- and not just in this book -- is Film Noir, a cinema character brought to life who by himself makes the whole book worthwhile.

Then the villains step up to the plate, headed by "heavy hitters": the Serpent Queen (Horus' arch-foe), the time-traveling mega-villain Praetorian, and Sepulchre (who, although he owes some pretty obvious debts to existing characters, is still more wicked-looking than any of them). Most of the baddies are in groups, like the Sinister Circle, a team whose membership has undergone more changes than even the Sentinels; Hell's Belles, a sexy outlaw rock group whose necromantic style is a bit more gruesome than most four-color games allow; and the Black Knights, who are just in it for the money. The solo operatives aren't overwhelming, but there are a couple of gems like the demonic dealmaker the Lord of Mirrors and the effectively disturbing fey know as the Crone.

The appendix is perhaps the weakest part of the book . . . not that all of it is bad, just that it's often unremarkable. The

feats are mostly bonuses to skills (some with predictable names like Jack of All Trades, but hey, since everyone else has used it . . .). There's a new way to assign minions, should you need to beef up the ranks beyond what the core ***Mutants & Masterminds*** book offers, and a feat for getting points to spend on special vehicles. The knockback rules get some tweaking, nauseate is codified, and dimensional travel is an extra for yanking things around in time and space. In any case, if it all proves useless know that there are only a few pages of it.

They pack a lot onto a page. Not only are the portraits nicely done (a little sub-par when compared to your average comic -- competently drawn, but the characters look a bit listless, like they're only now trying on their costumes), but the layout is sharp and informative, and the writing is concise.

BlackWyrms is to be commended for its quality material. If you have to put out a book like this in what is already an overcrowded market, it had better shine. This ***The Algernon Files*** does, and then some. Some sentences are awkward, run long, or overuse big qualifiers (like "phenomenal"), but the text is professionally managed. The writing remains simple, entertaining, and crisp, the world presented feels like part of an organic whole, and the work feels personal. Even when something harkens back to the old saws one finds in comics and their cross-marketed brethren, ***BlackWyrms Games*** makes the work their own with fresh and reinvigorated characters and ideas.

--Andy Vetromile

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Zero Sum, Many Lots

Lately I've been reading -- and reading about -- some old comic stories. ("Old" as in "1950s-1960s old," you young whippersnappers.) One of the aspects that amazed me about them is how willing -- nay, eager -- the comics of that era were to fling out concepts for stories that would seem to have long-ranging consequences, but would never be dealt with again.

In one story, Superman (as Clark Kent) is visited by his Aunt Minerva, a meddling old woman who is the younger sister of his foster father Jonathan Kent, and thus (presumably) not from Krypton. Aunt Minerva insists on moving in, since, y'know, she's family and all. Typical hijinks ensue revolving around Minerva possibly discovering Kent likes to dress up in a flashy outfit and come out of closets. Eventually Kent convinces Minerva to marry a suitor who's been stalking her (and is, presumably, even crazier than *her*) and the two of them ride off into the sunset, presumably never to be seen again.

(Standard disclaimer: I swear I'll tie this into gaming just as soon as I think of a way how.)

In a similarly old Batman story, Bruce Wayne is visited by his cousin Bruce N. Wayne, who is Bat-Bruce's namesake and is also, certainly coincidentally, a master detective. Typical hijinks ensue revolving around N. Wayne possibly discovering Bat-Wayne likes to adorn himself with masks and handcuffs and come out of caves. Eventually Bat-Wayne convinces N. Wayne that he's *not* Batman, and N. Wayne rides off into the sunset, presumably never to be seen again.

While I live the manic imagination behind these old tales, as a modern fan I find myself baffled, since both of these tales would seriously affect modern perceptions of the character. Envision a rain-soaked Dark Knight perched atop a gargoyle of a suitably gothic tower. The thought balloon reads: "I find myself waging an unending war against crime, all stemming from the night a criminal gunned down my entire family. Oh, except for my namesake cousin Bruce, the master detective. I wonder how he's doing, anyway?"

These thoughts came springing to mind as I was running a **Torg** game at [Dreamation](#) this year. (See? Related to gaming! Only took two paragraphs! I rule!!!!1one1) One of the problems of running a convention game coincided with one of the difficulties in how I run many campaigns: The idea of a zero-sum game. See, the ability to make a campaign-wide difference in a con game is (or probably should be) close to zero . . . or, perhaps a bit more correctly, the change the characters have a chance of affecting the campaign world should be determined ahead of time by the gamemaster. ("So, to recap, in this game world the Emperor is the most important being in the known worlds. As you stand over the body -- having unexpectedly killed him -- visions of the galaxy's collapse fill your eyes and -- coincidentally -- give me a migraine . . .")

The zero-sum adventure ensures that events are more or less where they were at the beginning of the adventure . . . or, perhaps more importantly, the events of the adventure will not advance the overall storyline of the campaign beyond where it began at the beginning of the campaign.

The difference between a zero-sum game and, say, a [static](#) campaign is subtle but significant. In a static campaign, the game world won't change. In a zero-sum game, the game world could change, but it won't because the PCs don't let it. As a result, a zero-sum adventure requires a bit more cooperation on the part of the players.

For example, in a static campaign a PC detective might encounter a diary where he discovers that his cousin was *also* a famous detective, and happened to be his namesake. Perhaps the diary leads the detective to his cousin's last unsolved case. At the end of the adventure, he can confidently put the diary away, knowing that any future adventures won't have anything to do with his formerly unmentioned cousin. In a zero-sum game, the namesake cousin *himself* shows up, presents the PC with an unsolved case (which he, naturally, solves), and at the end of the adventure the cousin wanders off; this cousin is also never seen again, but simply because the PC chooses not to do so!

Of course, the reason he doesn't do so is because it'd mess up the ongoing stories. And this zero-sum assumption

allows the GM to tell tales that wouldn't be otherwise possible. As another example, in my convention game I had a bunch of ninja in invisibility suits attacking the heroes. Heroes win; ninja fall over. Now, what *didn't* happen is the immediate looting of the ninja for their keen suits. In a static game they simply wouldn't work (or they had self-destruction circuits, or whatever); the PCs can try to change the game world, but the game world fights back. In a zero-sum game, however, the PCs don't even *try*; it would be against genre conventions to try to loot the ninja, so they didn't even bother.

What are the advantages of a zero-sum game? Well, first it gives the GM a lot of freedom that's otherwise impossible. In particular, any kind of unusual tech – such as from gadgeteers or aliens – can be introduced, and at best the only concern about the long-term effects of that gear is that it might become part of the heroes' trophy case. ("Hmm . . . Moon-Men are attacking? We need to get out of here and think of a new plan! Oh, make sure you hit the light switch by the Orbital Laser on the way out . . .") For players, you get to enjoy a wider range of possible adventures (Long-lost cousins! Under-earth races! Romances with invisible beings who only live for a week!) without worrying about the long-term consequences.

Sure, it's cinematic – nay, unrealistic – as all get-out. But it can be fun. And it's possible to use the idea selectively (such as the idea of [zero-sum knowledge](#) in a game). And it's also a premise that's difficult to implement in other commercial campaigns, making it another "[unsellable](#)" idea you can enjoy yourself.

* * *

Tonight at 7pm CST the *Pyramid* [chat room](#) will be invaded by the Wizard of Weird, Kenneth Hite. He'll be talking about his soon-to-be-released **GURPS Infinite Worlds** and will no doubt be happy to answer your questions about that or, time permitting, anything else your heart desires.

And if you're not a *Pyramid* subscriber yet . . . then how the heck are you reading this?!

--Steven Marsh

Union Space

A Modern Day Space Campaign

by Steve Jensen

History

In July of 1969, man first set foot on the moon. After that, to the general public, the "space race" against the Soviet Union had been won. Over the following years, interest in space exploration waned, and only the smallest leaps in technology were shown to the public.

In reality, the space race continued for decades. After the moon landings, and the creation of the space shuttles, the United States began spending billions on faster than light research and **Technology**: These projects were kept completely secret of course, as the cold war continued primarily in an effort to develop this technology and keep it out of the hands of other countries.

Working FTL theories were fully developed by 1972, and a working FTL spacecraft was built in Nevada in 1974, and the exploration of space began. The first star system reached was Alpha Centauri, which took three months of travel to reach. By 1977, six more star systems had been explored and the speed of the new starships being developed was gradually increasing. By this time, the Soviet Union had also built their own secret FTL project and explored some of these same star systems. They also kept this a secret from the United States.

However, in mid-1978 an explorer from the United States detected a Russian spacecraft as it entered our star system. As the U.S. ship watched, the Soviet craft was attacked by an unknown alien craft. Responding to the distress call, the armed U.S. ship disabled the smaller alien craft and rescued the Russians from their ruined starship. With the Russians on board and the alien ship in their cargo hold, the Americans returned home. The secret was out that both the Russians and Americans had FTL ships, although the public still had no idea. A treaty to study the alien craft jointly was signed, and researchers made several discoveries.

The first regarded the aliens themselves. Only one alien survived, and it was imprisoned and studied. The alien was a Menon. This led to deciphering first the Menon language and then their computer records. Their records showed that Earth was a "claimed world," and that listening posts had been set up on the Moon to monitor Human space activity. It was learned that the Menon were planning an eventual invasion and enslavement of the primitive Humans, but considered Earth as a non-threat due to its low technology; however, if advanced space flight was ever detected by the Menon, the invasion plans would be pushed forward.

The next discovery was that the Menon ship had detected the Russian explorer and was planning to head home to report on the discovery. The ship had no FTL communication technology, which Earth has also not yet developed. The final discovery was the Menon **Technology**: Several systems that were reverse engineered, included artificial gravity and a gravity-based reactionless drive system. The study also revealed that we had technology that the aliens apparently lacked, including advanced stealth technology and newly developed force fields.

The result of these discoveries resulted in an agreement between the United States and Soviet Union. No new space technology would be made publicly available, and only the most basic satellites and already existing spacecraft would be used for orbital flights, while both countries began building a defense fleet in secret. Several other countries were informed of these events when they began developing space technologies, including China and Europe.

This treaty held until in 1990, the Soviet Union began to collapse, due to the massive expense it invested into its space defense program. The new leadership of Russia wanted to begin using the fleet to further explore and gain intelligence on the alien enemy. A compromise was finally reached, and the Union was formed.

The Union was originally called the United Earth Space Defense Union, but that name quickly fell out of use in preference of just calling it the Union. The goal of the Union was both defense of Earth against all extra-terrestrial threats, as well as the exploration of space and the gathering of information on any possible threats.

That was 14 years ago. Today, in 2004, the Union has a fleet of over 100 warships and explorers, most of which are now housed in huge underground facilities in Nevada and several other locations around the world.

The Union

The union is a secret multi-national organization that is primarily responsible for the defense of Earth from hostile alien races and exploration of deep space. The Union keeps itself a secret due to the frequent "checkups" that aliens perform on Earth. Although the aliens have established and retrieve data from sensing systems in several places in the solar system, they still occasionally make detailed scans, collecting samples with their scout ships. The Union regularly tampers with their sensor stations to hide any possible evidence of their starship use, but they can't stop the scout ships from scanning the planet. At these times, all Union starship activity halts until the scouts move on. The general public is kept unaware to keep mention of the Union and its activities out of the news. A news broadcast of human starship capability would easily be intercepted by one of these scouts, and result in a Menon invasion of Earth.

Union Operations

The Union has several mission types it performs routinely:

- **Information Interception:** The aliens have several listening posts in our solar system. All of them are known to us and they have been tampered with to record only specific information that the Union feeds them.
- **Alien Awareness:** Periodically, one or more alien ships enter our solar system; they are on a schedule that can usually be predicted. At these times, all Union space activity is halted while the aliens pick up their recordings and scout the system.
- **Alien Defense:** On two occasions, alien ships in our system have had to be destroyed when they detected Union operations. The wreckage of one was intentionally crashed into the Moon near their listening post (which is unmanned), and the other captured and brought back for study. These events do not seem to have raised the aliens' suspicion.
- **Exploration:** Five starships have been designed for stealth operations and used to explore other star systems in order to locate the enemy. Four are operating at any one time and the fifth is reserved for rescue operations. At this time, only two alien colonies have been located, both from different alien species.
- **Technological Development:** All new space technology Earth develops, as well as any recovered alien technology, is studied and incorporated into the existing fleet, as well as into new ship designs.
- **Construction:** At this time, the Union is building a new starship about every month. Most of these are flown once to shake them down, and then are stored in one of the underground bases for future use. Most have full crews standing by in case they're needed, and personnel are regularly rotated into the active exploration crews.
- **Research:** The union has hundreds of scientists around the world working in secret on various research and development projects that it plans to keep hidden from the public. Most of these projects are directly related to space travel and the technology to support it.

Union Technology

The Earth is TL8 while the Union has access to TL9 hardware with a few captured and reproduced technologies that are TL10. The Union has access to the following technologies that the general population of Earth has no knowledge of.

- **Warp Drives (TL9):** The Union developed faster-than-light space travel in 1974 and has been refining it for the past 30 years. FTL equipped ships have a series of field emitters embedded in the skin of a ship which "push" space away from the ship. The effect of this is that some of the laws of physics fail, allowing the ship's normal

engines to propel the ship past the speed of light. This "warp field," which is better described as an area with a reduction of physical laws around the ship, also prevents the ship from being damaged from collisions with space dust. When the dust enters the field, its velocity becomes relative to the ship as if the ship were moving at normal sublight speed. The speed of the ship is limited by the strength of the field, the ship's engine power, and collisions with dust particles, which tend to collapse the field if too much dust enters it.

- **Artificial Gravity (TL10):** This technology was reverse engineered from captured alien **Technology:** Emitters in the deck plates project a field directly above them that can simulate the pull of up to 1.5g. This technology is poorly understood by the Union, but is easily reproducible.
- **Gravity Drives (TL10):** The gravity drive technology is another that was gained from reverse engineering alien examples and quickly replaced the chemical rockets and ion drives that had previously been used. The engines consist of large projectors that produce a high negative gravity field within the "exhaust cones" of the engines, which push the ship away from the gravity field. The engines produce this field constantly, which essentially produces a constant thrust. As a side effect, solid weaponry cannot easily strike a ship from behind when the engines are on.
- **Cold Fusion Power (TL9):** This energy source has actually been invented several times by Earth's scientists, but each time, the Union has stepped in and suppressed it, usually hiring the scientists involved. The cold fusion signature is one of the power sources the aliens actively are trying to detect to gauge Earth's level of **Technology:** These power plants are powerful and safe, and are being used to power all of the Union's starships, and have heavy shielding on them to prevent detection.
- **Weaponry (TL9):** Lasers have been developed into very powerful weapon systems and are mounted on all Union ships. The ship's lasers are also used for communication with other Union ships and with the Earth. Beamed laser messages are generally considered secure from interception. Most ships also carry a small number of nuclear missiles, but these are ineffective as space weaponry due to the ease of shooting them down. They are primarily intended as ground attack weapons, but may be used as a last resort to hide evidence of the ship itself to prevent capture.
- **Shields (TL9):** Humans developed force field technology in 1982. As yet, no aliens seem to have developed any kind of force field system. All Union ships are equipped with them, and smaller systems are installed on most combat vehicles. They are too bulky still for personal use.
- **Stealth (TL9):** Due to the cold war and the Union's need to keep its secret, Humans greatly developed their stealth **Technology:** The dull black finish and other ECM systems on the Union starships greatly reduce the chance of detection by radar and prevent many other kinds of detection systems as well.

Aliens

So far, four alien species have been detected.

The Menon

The Menon come from a world with a dimmer sun than Humans. Their home world never evolved mammalian or reptilian life, allowing insect life forms to develop into higher forms. The Menon evolved from the hunter/gatherer caste of a type of predatory species that has since disappeared from their world. They have no caste system and are not a hive mind.

So far, no Menon worlds have been found, but two of their slave worlds have been.

- **Appearance/Physiology:** The Menon are a humanoid insect-like race, with an interior skeleton as well as a thick exoskeleton. They stand as tall as an average man. Their bodies are thin and streamlined, allowing them to run and swim very quickly. They have two arms, each with three fingers and a thumb, and two legs. Their heads are flat with a large mouth, small nostrils, and a row of three small eyes on each side of their heads. They are able to see much better than humans, ranging into the ultraviolet spectrum. They are about as strong as the average human. They have no hair and they range in color from light to dark gray. They are distinguished from one another by the size and shape of shell ridges on their heads, as well as tattoos and inlaid metals and gems in their shells. They wear clothing when needed as humans do.

- **Psychology:** The Menon are a very materialistic race that believes that everything has a price. They believe that any worlds they discover through exploration are theirs along with the populations on them.
- **Technology:** The Menon are generally a TL10 culture. Menon have faster drives, more efficient power systems, and their systems are generally about 50% better than the Human equivalent. However, they have no shield technology, and Human stealth technology is much more advanced. One of the technologies they have developed are brain implants that can control the actions of the implanted subject, as well as increase their intelligence, but also giving them a slave mentality. This has been fully developed for the Baro, and prototypes are being tested for several other races.
- **Role in the Campaign:** In most campaigns, the Menon will serve the roll of the "evil bad guy" race, with most adventures having them as antagonists in some way.

Menon Racial Template

Basic Move +1 (+5 points)
 Damage Resistance 3 (+15 points)
 Ultravision (+10 points)
 Acute Vision 2 (+4 points)
 Peripheral Vision (+15 points)
 Night Vision 2 (+4 points)
 Greedy (-15 points)
 +38 points total

Kidiv

The Kidiv evolved on a desert world from hunter-gatherer primitives that spent their lives under foot of their world's dinosaur sized wildlife. They developed technology much slower than man did, taking hundreds of years between the invention of space flight and when they discovered FTL travel. As such, the race had sent out dozens of STL colony ships to colonize nearby stars and colonized nearly every rock ball in their home system. The Kidiv went to war with the Menon almost as soon as they discovered FTL travel. The Menon, having been in space for many years, had discovered and enslaved 2 worlds that the Kidiv had colonized with STL ships.

Humans have detected one such enslaved colony world, but have not yet found any free Kidiv worlds. Only 1 Kidiv starship has been seen, but contact was short and little information was learned from them.

- **Appearance/Physiology:** The Kidiv are shape-wise and anatomically, very similar to humans, but they have a reptilian appearance, with scales of various colors depending on their heritage. They have slit-pupil eyes that are colorblind. They reproduce similar to humans, but lay eggs instead of having live births.
- **Psychology:** Although slightly smarter on average than a Human, they are less imaginative and slower to develop new ideas. This makes them poor inventors or scientists, but they have a greater understanding of these things once the ideas are finally developed. The race has little understanding of light technology and instead of names for colors, they have names of shades of gray.
- **Technology:** Kidiv have similar technology to the Menon, but use mass projectors and missiles instead of lasers, which is resulting in their ships being easily beaten in space battles. Their worlds typically have much lower technology, depending on the individual society. Many of their colonies are TL5 or 6 and the average TL on their home world is only 9, with access to TL10 technology available to large corporations, universities, and governments.
- **Role in the Campaign:** The Kidiv can be either enemies or allies, depending on how well contact with them goes. They have met no friendly races so far and may easily mistake Humans as another Menon puppet race.

Kidiv Racial Template

IQ +1 (+20 points)
 Colorblindness (-10 points)

+10 points total

Fen

The Fen were just coming out of their dark ages and beginning a renaissance period in technology when Menon explorers found their world and began colonizing it. A large portion of their population was enslaved by the god like bugs from the sky. Their world was industrialized and became one of the Menon's largest colony worlds. The Fen have been exported to several other Menon colony worlds as slave labor.

- **Appearance/Physiology:** The Fen evolved from tree dwelling leaf-eating bears. They are slightly shorter than an average human and thinner. They have short fur over most of their bodies, which has a similar color range to human hair. They have two arms and two legs and a short non-prehensile tail usually about a foot long for an adult. They have vaguely bear-like faces.
- **Technology:** For the most part, their world is TL6, but the areas where the Menon have high populations are more modern.
- **Role in the Campaign:** The Fen are an example of what the Menon have in store for Earth. Unlike the Baro though, the Fen can and do occasionally rise up in revolt, resulting in large losses of life.

Fen Racial Template

1 ST (-10 points)

+1 DX (+20 points)

+1 HT (+10 points)

Social Stigma: Subjugated (-20 points)

0 points total

Baro

The Baro are another primitive race that the Menon discovered and enslaved. Naturally, the Baro are little more than animals, but when discovered by the Menon, several specimens were artificially augmented with implants that increased their intelligence to make them better slaves. Over several decades, more and more implants were developed to make them better-equipped laborers.

- **Appearance/Physiology:** The Baro appear like a horse standing on thicker hind legs with an extra set of arms half way up. They have two legs that end in bony hooves and four arms with two fingers and a thumb on each hand. They have long narrow heads with two eyes and a small mouth and small nostrils. They average nine feet in height and 520 lbs. Virtually all adult Baro, other than the primitives that have not been enslaved, have numerous cybernetic augmentations, and all have a common brain implant that increases their intelligence and helps to insure their loyalty. Without this brain implant, they have roughly the same intelligence of smart chimps or Neanderthal man. The implant also improves the Baro's memory. If the implant is damaged, a Baro will still remember things, but accessing those memories will be spotty at best. Baro children are usually not implanted till the age of 15, after they reach maturity. This is when any schooling takes place, which means that a Baro with a human high school education may be as old as 30 years old. Of course, a long education costs a lot of money, so Baro are only taught just what they need to do a specific job.
- **Psychology:** Baro are a very matter-of-fact race, with virtually no belief systems. They have no religions and don't believe in the supernatural at all. This made them a difficult race for the Menon to enslave, until their brain implants were developed. Few members of the race have phobias. They are a proud race with a very ingrained honor system that even the implants haven't been able to suppress.
- **Technology:** The Baro's technology comes entirely from the Menon. The few areas of their homeworld where Baro are free and still primitive are TL0.
- **Role in the Campaign:** The Baro are the muscle the Menon will use as security and labor on most of their worlds.

Primitive Baro Racial Template

+3 ST (-10% for Size Mod 1) (+27 points)
+5 Lifting ST (-10% for Size Mod 1) (+14 points)
-1 DX (-20 points)
-3 IQ (-60 points)
+1 HT (+10 points), +5 HP (+10 points), Size Mod. 1 (0 points)
Tech Level 0 (-45 points)
Damage resistance 1, Thick Skin (-40%), (+3 points)
2 Extra Arms (+20 Points).
-41 points total.

Enhanced Baro Racial Template

+3 ST (-10% for Size Mod 1) (+27 points)
+5 Lifting ST (-10% for Size Mod 1) (+14 points)
-1 DX (-20 points)
+1 HT (+10 points), +5 HP (+10 points), Size Mod. 1 (0 points)
Damage resistance 1, Thick skin (-40%), (+3 points)
2 Extra Arms (+20 Points)
Slave mentality (-40 points)
Social Stigma: Subjugated (-20 points)
+4 points total.
Note: Enhanced Baro will also have a variety of cybernetic implants depending on their job.

Adventure Themes

The following are several possible ideas for Union Space campaigns.

- **Explorers:** The crew of the U.S.S. (Union Star Ship) Washington has been sent to explore new star systems and possible Menon worlds. The ship must, of course, not reveal itself as a Human ship to prevent the Menon from invading Earth.
- **War Fleet:** The time has come to defend Earth and its warships are launched. The PCs might be crew of a battleship with orders to find and attack Menon ships, or find allies in the war.
- **Abducted:** The characters might be average modern-day citizens that are abducted by the Menon for study and interrogation and wind up in a prison on one of their worlds. Can they escape alone, or do they need rescue by the Union? Also, the Union can't let the PCs let the secret out; do they recruit the PCs or imprison them on Earth?
- **Conspiracy Theory:** The heroes might be reporters, investigators, or conspiracy theorists looking into odd rumors that America has working spacecraft. How far are they willing to go to find the truth, and how far will the Union go to protect the secret?
- **Revolt:** The PCs are slaves of the Menon, human or alien, and have decided to start a revolt to free the colony world they're on from the Menon tyranny.

More Questions than Answers

Small But Satisfying

by Chris Aylott

Hear that noise? It's crunch time in the roleplaying segment of the adventure game hobby.

The sales consolidation of the last couple of years has been picking up speed, and over the last few months the numbers have gotten so bad that publishers are openly admitting that they're in trouble. Guardians of Order got rid of its employees. Hero Games seems to be getting rid of its retailers. Other companies are dropping lines and moving on to greener pastures.

And what does a humble retailer like me have to say to all of this?

"Good."

Here's the thing. I seem to make about the same amount of sales whether I have 100 RPG titles on the shelves or 500. I've been tracking my lines for years, and at any given moment I'm making a bunch of money on ***Dungeons & Dragons***, a slightly smaller bunch of money on White Wolf's games, and some handfuls of money on whichever one or two other game lines are hot in the community at the moment.

That mix has shifted recently; more official ***Dungeons & Dragons***, product, less everything else. The overall number has also grown with the overall growth of the business. But it's about the same amount of money, now more concentrated in the market leader. And as I nip and tuck the RPG section, I'm finding I can make that money on less than half the inventory I carried three years ago.

The same or more money on less inventory means more money for me. More money for me means the World's Greatest Baby gets Huggies and not Luvs. The World's Greatest Baby likes Huggies. Therefore, I like industry consolidation.

One store doesn't confirm a trend. But the Wizards of the Coast RPG section has been having very good years lately, and most other RPG publishers have not. The money has been moving to the market leaders for more than two years now, and it's time for RPG creators to face the likelihood that the money isn't going to move back.

This doesn't mean it's impossible to run a successful RPG business that's not Wizards of the Coast. But it's getting harder all the time, and it looks like most of the current RPG businesses don't know how to compete. So what's an RPG creator going to do when he can't make a living creating RPGs?

What's My Motivation?

Let's gaze into our navels for a moment. (Hmm. Belly lint.) Why do roleplaying game creators create?

It can't be the money. As been pointed out many times, most creators can make more money flipping burgers at McDonald's. It could be the pleasure of running a business, because some creators do enjoy that. Not much we can do for those folks, but they're the ones with the best chance of succeeding in today's market. Most creators draw their satisfaction from the act of creation itself. They want to share ideas with the world, and the money is a secondary reward.

That's the motivation of an artist, not a business person. If you're in business, you do a project because you think it will make money, and you drop it the moment a better investment comes along. (If you haven't guessed already, I'm a

business person.) If you're an artist, you do a project because you have to, and you don't drop it until your need to express yourself is fulfilled.

In the past, I've believed that game creators should think of themselves as business people, that they should demand fair value for their products and make their decisions based on what will be the best return for their efforts. I've turned around on that idea. In a market where only a few participants can hope gain financial reward for their efforts, doesn't it make more sense to opt out of the business world and pursue your dreams as an artist?

What happens when we stop looking at games as commercial products . . . and start looking at them as art?

Tyger, Tyger Burning Bright

As art objects, roleplaying games kind of suck. The typical RPG book offers ugly art, arcane text, budget printing and machine binding. Most publishers try to put out work that is adequate and affordable, to get their work out to the widest audience possible.

Contrast this with the experience of William Blake. More than just a poet, Blake considered his [art and calligraphy](#) to be as important as the words he wrote. Even his text colors were carefully chosen -- he mostly wrote in orange and brown, but used blue and other colors for emphasis and other effects.

Blake couldn't mass-produce his books with the technology of the time, so he didn't try to reach a mass audience. He printed and bound only 18 copies of *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and scholars believe he only sold one of them at full price. As a commercial publisher, William Blake was a disaster with "a horror of money" -- but he is still read today, and copies of *Songs of Innocence and Experience* have sold for more than a million dollars.

It's hard to imagine any RPG creator becoming literary history in the way that Blake is. But he represents an ideal that's very different from the commercial striving of today's game publishers. Blake didn't produce his works, he crafted them. He made his books look and feel and read exactly the way he wanted them to, and if that meant making only a few copies, then so be it.

Creating an RPG could be more than writing some rules text, drawing some fantasy art and slapping it together on standard paper in a standard size and binding. After years of decline, the art of fine bookmaking is being revived in artisans' workshops and university courses. Once you embrace the idea of creating games as art rather than commerce, there's no reason not to give as much attention to the form of the game as its content.

What would it be like to own a hand-made roleplaying game? To know that you possess a work of imagination that only a few dozen or a hundred people can ever own? To appreciate the work as much with your eyes and hands as your mind?

Seeding the Microclimate

Then again, maybe the art of the roleplaying game doesn't lie in its physical form. Games come to life when you play them, and the book on the table may be less important than what the players do with it. If that is the case, then how can the creator of a game pursue the art of how it is played?

One solution may be to make the game more personal and specific to its players. Roleplayers have a long history of customizing and tinkering with their games. Almost all RPGs are "unfinished," in the sense that once the players get a hold of the game, they have to tweak it to fit their individual playing style. The commercial game designer can't do much to help the players improve the fit of their game, and rarely has the opportunity to learn from the players' improvements.

An artistic game creator dealing with a small group of patrons has more flexibility. The creator can act as a kind of Super-GM, giving and receiving suggestions on rules, adventure plots, and setting material. The creator can

personalize the game for its players, combining the comfortable fit of house rules with the authority of official rules.

The possibilities get even more interesting if the creator works with a small network of different player groups. If several independent groups are playing within the same official setting, and that setting is monitored by its creator, then each group can have an effect on the setting. If Player Group A stirs up trouble in one province, then the creator can update the official setting in ways that affect the adventures of Player Groups B, C, and D.

In this model, the creator's art becomes the presentation of a consistent, fun, living world that reacts to the deeds of all the players participating in the game. Playing the game would be like participating in a really good LARP, only without the boffer weapons and trips to the woods. (In fact, this kind of creator-driven game would work well as a LARP.)

Like most performance art, this kind of art is ephemeral. You can preserve records of what happened, but the art lies in the experience itself. On the other hand, it's possible to spread the experience through an entire community.

A creator could hook up with a local store and use it to launch a series of games played by customers of the store. Each individual gaming group would be able to play a customized campaign on its own, but each group would also be part of a larger experience. The store also benefits through sales of the setting materials and hosting paid events designed by the creator. A brilliant "mega-campaign" would be remembered and relived by the entire community for years to come.

And There's Always PDF

Of course, roleplayers are a conservative breed. (How else to explain our undying love of 30-year-old game systems and British comedy shows?) Putting out books on PDF may be all the self-expression that most creators need, and there's certainly nothing stopping them from running money-losing small presses.

But if you're not going to have a million dollar idea, wouldn't it be nice to make a game that is more than just fifteen minutes of fame on the Forge or RPG.net? Why not push the envelope a little and really create?

Affections Dark As Erebus: *The Merchant of Venice*

*"The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted."*

-- William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, V:i:93-98

As we do each [Valentine's Day](#), we turn to stories of love. Love, and ritual sacrifice; love, and a werewolf; love, and the highest of high magics. In short, to Shakespeare, and his [dramaturgies](#) of the heart. As with [last year](#), our story lies in Venice. Pull back the curtain, and let the music play.

*"In sooth I know not why I am so sad,
It wearies me, you say it wearies you;
But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
I am to learn."*

-- William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, I:i:1-5

Antonio, a merchant of Venice, loves his bosom friend Bassanio, who is smitten with the beautiful heiress Portia of Belmont. Bassanio has borrowed from the generous Antonio before, but needs another big loan to woo Portia in style. Antonio's capital is tied up in ships overseas, but he borrows 3,000 ducats from Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. Shylock, seeing Antonio on the verge of bankruptcy, offers the loan without interest, but if Antonio cannot repay it, Shylock may claim instead a pound of Antonio's flesh. With the money, Bassanio and his lackey Gratiano go to Belmont, where Portia's suitors must find her portrait in one of three caskets. The rulers of Morocco and Aragon choose the gold and silver caskets, unwisely, but true Bassanio (with much help from Portia's musical selections) chooses the lead casket and wins Portia's heart. She marries Bassanio, and gives him a ring.

While this is going on, Shylock's daughter Jessica has eloped with Bassanio's friend Lorenzo (and with much of Shylock's fortune), enraging the moneylender against all Christians. When Antonio's ships are reported lost at sea, Shylock demands repayment at court. Bassanio rushes back to Venice for the trial. Shylock rejects Bassanio's offer of triple repayment (with Portia's money), demanding the letter of the bond be fulfilled. Portia, disguised as a lawyer, pleads for mercy to no avail -- and then points out that his bond does not include blood, and if Shylock takes over one pound of flesh by even a fraction, he will be hung for murder. Portia then turns the screws further, arguing that by seeking Antonio's life, Shylock must turn over his wealth to Antonio and to the Duke. On the condition that he become a Christian, this sentence is suspended, and Antonio is free. Out of gratitude, Bassanio gives the "lawyer" Portia's ring and returns to Belmont -- where, when Portia demands her ring, he shamefully admits he cannot produce it. She reveals her masquerade, returns her ring to Bassanio, and all the lovers are happy. Even Antonio is consoled when three of his ships miraculously return, restoring his fortune.

*"The paper is the body of my friend,
And every word in it a gaping wound,
Issuing life-blood."*

-- William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, III:ii:256-258

The Merchant of Venice was entered into the Stationer's Register on July 22, 1598. Shakespeare most likely wrote it in the fall of 1596, since it includes a topical reference to Essex' raid on Cadiz that summer, but that date is speculative. 1596 is also when Shakespeare's most likely source for the courtroom scene, Sylvain's *Les Histoires Tragiques*, first appeared in English. The basic story of the courtship of Portia, the pound of flesh, and the ring-and-disguise routine came from Fiorentino's 1558 *Il Pecorone*, in which "the Lady of Belmonte" challenges her suitors to remain awake to claim her, and drugs their wine to make them sleep. Shakespeare added the "casket bit" (which he likely took from the

14th century *Gesta Romanorum*) to this unpleasant tale, along with the names Portia and Shylock. "Shylock" is entirely Shakespeare's coinage, and comes either from the Hebrew word *shalak*, meaning "cormorant" (a legendarily greedy and rapacious bird), or from "shullock," obscure Tudor-era slang for a shabby or contemptible person.

"What! are there masques? Hear you me, Jessica:

Lock up my doors; and when you hear the drum,

And the vile squealing of the wry-neck'd fife,

Clamber not you up to the casements then.

. . . By Jacob's staff I swear

I have no mind of feasting forth to-night."

-- William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, II:v:25-34

Shakespeare cast the whole thing in the model of a Shrovetide (or Carnival, in Venice) masque. Possibly he wanted to create as glamorous a show as possible for his company's move to Blackfriars Theatre, or possibly to increase the chance of noble patronage, nobles being fond of shows with lots of music and bright clothing. Jessica and Lorenzo elope during just such a masque in Act II, and Act V at Portia's manor in Belmont can be seen as a similar performance. Belmont is almost a [fairyland](#), a moonlit realm located [over the water](#) from Venice. Parallels between the ["Beautiful Mountain"](#) and the [Venusberg](#) or other fairy realms "under the hill" strengthen when we remember the enchanted sleep "the Lady of Belmonte" casts her suitors into in the original sources for our play. Portia becomes another Circe or Medea, and perhaps it is mere coincidence that in Belmont Jessica refers to Medea gathering "enchanted herbs" of eternal life, or that Bassanio identifies Portia's hair with the "golden fleece" and Belmont with "Colchos' strand."

"There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st

But in his motion like an angel sings,

Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims;

Such harmony is in immortal souls;

But whilst this muddy vesture of decay

Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it."

-- William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, V:i:60-65

The other quality of Belmont is the omnipresent music, which it also shares with the fairy courts. Music is a recurring theme in the play, with Lorenzo going so far as to explicate Pythagorean notions of the "music of the spheres" in the speech quoted above. Antonio has "music in his soul," and is a purer person; by contrast, Shylock prevents music from even entering his house. As Lorenzo says (in a speech that thematically seems displaced from the masque in Act II to the one in Act V), "the man that hath no music in himself . . . Let no such man be trusted." Antonio forbids music at Shylock's toast to money, perhaps trying to blank Shylock out of the masque and out of the play -- or cosmos -- entirely.

But although the leaden, lugubrious Shylock may be unwelcome, he has his own Pythagorean element to contribute. As Gratiano says, Shylock "almost makest me waver in my faith, to hold opinion with Pythagoras," referring to metempsychosis -- the transference of souls -- not music. He calls Shylock the "wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous" reincarnation of "a wolf, hang'd for human slaughter," a gibe among the many canine slurs which make Shylock respond "But since I am a dog, beware my fangs." Heinrich Heine in 1839 went so far as to openly call Shylock a [werewolf](#), the ultimate outsider in Portia's fairyland.

"It doth appear you are a worthy judge;

You know the law, your exposition

Hath been most sound: I charge you by the Law,

Whereof you are a well-deserving Pillar,

Proceed to Judgment: by my soul I swear

There is no power in the tongue of man

To alter me."

-- William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, IV:i:233-239

And from where did such Pythagorean notions enter Shakespearean England? Through the good offices of John Dee, of course, who took them from the Christian kabbalist Francesco Giorgi, a Franciscan friar of Venice (as it happens) who wrote *De harmonia mundi* in 1525. And when you shine the light of the kabbalah on Shakespeare's puissant words, yet more patterns emerge. The play turns on the tension between Judgment (the Old Testament law of Shylock) and Mercy (the New Testament law of Antonio). Portia must unite them, crossing between these two Pillars of the Sephiroth, woman disguised as man, arguing for mercy while destroying Shylock with his own severity. (Gratiano likewise has a name of grace -- *gratia* -- but shows nothing but hatred for Shylock.) Portia is thus Tiphareth, the sphere of Beauty, suspended between Shylock/Geburah (Severity) and Antonio/Chesed (Kindness). In Giorgi's kabbalah, Tiphareth is embodied by the sun, an apt role for the woman with golden hair to play. (Although Bassanio hints at her inversion when he says "We should hold day with the Antipodes, if you would walk in absence of the sun.") Lorenzo (whose name implies the victor's laurel) is thus Netzach (Victory) below Antonio on the Tree of Life; his changeable love Jessica (whose name -- which Shakespeare also invented -- stems from "Iscah," meaning something beheld) is the Mercurian Hod (Splendor) across the gap. Bassanio is Yesod (the Foundation, or "basis") below Portia/Tiphareth.

"And they have conspired together: I will not say you shall see a masque; but if you do, then it was not for nothing . . ."

-- William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, II:iv:24-25

And this is all without taking into account the troublesome nature of the rings given, lost, and returned, or the alchemical symbolism of the golden, silver, and lead caskets (the first two of which reveal only death and idiocy -- or madness). Shakespeare is hurling everything in his dramaturgical arsenal at this play, from his time-twisting jumps between Shrovetide, an implied Black Friday complete with blameless Christian sacrifice, and Shrovetide again, to the alchemical androgyny of three women (Jessica, Portia, and Portia's maid Nerissa) dressed as men. Why the desperation? Is he, too, trying to contain the ["wolfish"](#) Shylock, dressing him in "Jewish gaberdine" and then imprisoning him in Portia's fairy kabbalism? Was this play perhaps commissioned by the Earl of Essex, so instrumental in the judicial murder of Queen Elizabeth's Jewish physician Roderigo Lopez (cognate, of course, with *lupus*, or "wolf") in 1594? Did Essex' creature [Francis Bacon](#) demand that Shakespeare produce such a containment system, only to find himself and his brother Anthony (both in and out of debt repeatedly) enmeshed within it, as "Bassanio" (from "Bacon"?) and "Antonio"? If so, perhaps the containment system failed in 1601, or perhaps the play's maniacal inversions helped trigger [another play's](#) hidden petard. That year, the Queen ordered Shakespeare's company to perform "a play" for her on Shrove Tuesday. The next day, Elizabeth watched the execution of the Earl of Essex.

Pyramid Review

Horde Book 1: A Swarm of Stirges (for the *d20 System*)

Published by [Behemoth3](#)

Written by Travis Allison

Illustrated by Sang Lee

54-page perfect bound book; \$12

One of the many things to occur with the launch of *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition*, and the *d20 System* being made available to third parties, has been a re-examination of some of the classic monsters from the *Monster Manual*. Mongoose Publishing led the way with *The Slayer's Guide* series, and many publishers have followed suit with titles of their own. The latest to leap aboard this bandwagon is first time publisher Behemoth3 with the *Masters and Minions Series*, launching itself with two titles in the series at GenCon '04. The first of these is *Horde Book 1: A Swarm of Stirges*, the other being *Maze of the Minotaur*.

The humble Stirge can be best described as a blood-sucking cross between a bat and a fly (or, as one friend put it, "bats with big bums"). Since its first appearance in the *Monster Manual* in 1979, the Stirge has always been dismissed as a bothersome nuisance, a creature much like the Kobold to be put to the sword before going up a level. Having just celebrated their silver anniversary, this new book sets out to develop the ecology of the Stirge. It draws on the previous examinations written by Ed Greenwood and Tim Richardson, but goes further to add new creatures that either make use of the Stirge or appear because of its life cycle.

The first thing the supplement does is represent the Stirge itself, unchanged from the one that we know and love, that is to be found inhabiting dank dungeon corners, but also marshland and swamps. It is these last two habitats that this volume concentrates upon. The next step up from the Stirge is the Stirge Swarm, meriting an entry of its own because of the swarm rules found in the *d20 System* that make such collections of creatures all the more deadly. Given enough opportunities to feed, and then gorge on some more blood, a Stirge can metamorphose into the amphibious Blood Bloat. It loses the ability to fly, but is an excellent swimmer and the blood sucking proboscis becomes a flexible snout that ends in a tooth filled maw which is very efficient at siphoning the blood (and Hit Points) out of the victim it has latched onto. At home in marshes and swamps, the Blood Bloat constantly lays eggs in long strands of jelly. These attach to the local flora and hopefully will give birth to more Stirges.

The exsanguinated bodies of the victims of Stirges and Blood Bloats sometimes become the gateway for entities from the negative energy plane. This spirit consumes all of the body except the dermis, becoming as light as air undead animated humanoid balloons that can also be filled with substances to be turned into gently floating humanoid bombs. This includes the marsh filled Huskbomb, the germinating toxic spore filled Sporebomb; and the Rotbomb, filled with flesh eating bacteria.

A husk that consumes enough life energy can shed the need for the hollow skin, existing independent from the negative energy place as a Shadow. The filled husks are often used by the Ashmalkin, who also use the Stirges as flying mounts. Originating in the Faerie realms, these diminutive six-inch tall sexless creatures are a fractious lot, rarely agreeing among themselves. They tame and ride Stirges, and while they are capable alchemists, they are not innate spellcasters like other Fey. Ashmalkin have a fascination for necromancy and those that become arcane spellcasters often specialize in the dark arts. Although their weaponry is also diminutive, the Ashmalkin make up for it with alchemically enhanced weapons. The Flamedart and the Firefly Bolt are ranged weapons able to inflict flame damage, while their preferred choice in melee is the Shocklash. This is a strand of preserved nerve taken from the

swamp-dwelling variety of the electric eel. It deals subdual damage rather than lethal damage. This damage is light, but given a swarm of Ashmalkin so armed, could very easily overwhelm and capture a player character who will awake to find himself trussed up like Gulliver in Lilliput!

Ashmalkin can also be taken as player characters; their lack of Strength and Wisdom is made up for with good Intelligence, very good Dexterity, and an innate kinship with Stirges. Although they can be of any class, their favored class is the Wizard, which is surprising given their Chaotic Evil nature. Also available to Ashmalkin characters is the Wing Jockey Prestige Class, who forms a stronger bond with his mount and becomes a specialist in aerial combat. Unlike other prestige classes, this one has been purposefully designed so that an Ashmalkin can enter it at second level! This is justified to ensure that the Wing Jockey can be on a par with the encounter levels for the Stirge and the Stirge Horde.

There are two other notable side effects of a Stirge infestation, besides the rapacious consumption of local wildlife. The first is the increased manifestation of the Husks, which weakens the barrier between this world and the negative energy plane. If it grows too weak, incursions of undead follow, and the area becomes tainted, and then blighted. When the barrier is further weakened, negative energy can erupt into our world. The second effect is that hunters come to harvest Stirge gall bladders or gallduroi, beloved by gourmets, particularly as a stuffing or pate. But gallduroi are difficult to harvest and less scrupulous individuals will set up Stirge ranches, keeping a herd of humanoid cattle for the swarm to feed off.

All of this is put into practice with a selection of NPCs and adventure ideas, many of which are linked. For example, the ruler of Tenmanor wishes to clear a nearby swamp of Stirges and thus rid the area of this menace, but Twizz Arglegray, an 18th-level Ashmalkin Wizard is plotting to destroy the city of Tenmanor from its Plane of Shadow counterpart. Meanwhile, one of Twizz's victims, the Cleric Urthein Olgrem, seeks revenge for being turned into a Husk Lich. Meanwhile, an Ashmalkin Wing Jockey is running a Stirge ranch in the city. These ideas and hooks can be separated or placed elsewhere, but nevertheless make solid use of the concepts presented in this supplement.

Other support includes two sample lairs, a set of unit encounter tables, and so on. In addition, Behemoth3 include a password in the back of the book that gives the purchaser access to a hyperlinked version of both this supplement and the *d20 System's* 3.5 S.R.D.

Physically, *A Swarm of Stirges* is a well-done book, clearly written and containing some excellent pen and ink illustrations. The printing is a little rough inside the front and back cover though. A nice addition is the inclusion of the designer's notes throughout the supplement. These are both interesting and amusing to read, and do help the DM gain a handle on each creature or concept. For example, the Ashmalkin is explained as wanting to have a creature that is both comical and malevolent. The same goes for the Stirge, but then their malevolence is driven by the need to feed rather than by a simple evil.

Horde Book 1: A Swarm of Stirges does much to raise the humble beastie above the level of blood-sucking menace. Primarily this is done by focusing upon one habitat; the supplement's only real default is that it ignores the dungeon dwelling Stirge. The material is this designed for low to mid-level parties, but the author goes beyond this with tough opponents like the Ashmalkin wizard. The suggestion of playing in an all Ashmalkin game is also entertaining, what with their squabbling fractious nature. Overall, *Horde Book 1: A Swarm of Stirges* does more than you probably thought possible with an otherwise entirely dismissed creature, setting a solid benchmark for the *Masters & Minions* Series.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Space Shuffle

Published by [Playroom Entertainment](#)

Designed by Chris Baylis

Art, graphics by Design Edge, Inc. & Elisa Anya Jaeger

60 full-color cards (five Space Commander ID Cards, 55 planets in five colors), planet sheet, full-color rulebook; \$9.95

Playroom Entertainment wants to be like Out of the Box -- both companies seem like savvy teams, specializing in small, easy, often educational games. Furthermore, neither seems to have produced a dud thus far. *Space Shuffle*, Playroom's new card game about our solar system, isn't going to change that perception.

The object of the game is to score the most points for the planets you play. Everyone receives a Space Commander ID Card -- which is really just a cheat-sheet with the planets and their order listed for convenience -- and a hand of seven cards. On your turn, you play a card into one of the piles in the middle of the table, score points for it, and draw a card to replace it.

There are 55 Planet Cards, showing the 11 bodies of our solar system in five different colors. (Yes, this is just a shorthand born of convenience. They know the Sun isn't a planet, etc.) No more than five solar systems can be in play at once, though the different Planet Cards can be added to any system regardless of color. If you wish, you may start one of the systems with a card -- any card will do. If you choose to build on something someone else has already begun, you must play the heavenly body adjacent to it. For example, if someone starts a system with their Mars card, you can only play an Earth card in front of it or a Jupiter card behind it.

When you place a planet, you get the points listed on it. Not all copies of a planet are worth the same: Red Mars has a different value from Purple Mars and so on. Sedna's the exception; they're all worth six points (Sedna thinks it's so cool). Overall, the same values are used across a suite of color, but on different planets. If the card you play is your color (your Space Commander ID Card tells you what color you're playing), only you score. If you play someone else's color, both you and they get the points. But if there are other Planet Cards already in that system of that color, you get points for all those cards, so it may be worth it to give a few points to your yellow opponent if you get points for all the yellow cards there. Planet Cards are worth one to six points each.

You can't pass if you have a valid card. If you can't play a card, you must reveal your hand to everyone. Once you've played a card, you draw one to replace it and play passes to the left. Once the deck is exhausted, play continues until someone has emptied their hand of all seven cards, and the high score wins.

Although they come in nice, bright colors with a fancy picture of the appropriate planet, the physical quality of the cards is a bit slipshod. They're fairly flexible, and you can tell they're just waiting for a chance to bend in uncomfortable directions on you. Even a slip while shuffling can wrench it the wrong way.

You certainly can't say the game isn't up to date. Sedna, discovered only late in 2003, is included in the 11 system bodies even though arguments about its nature are still, uh . . . up in the air. It's listed alongside everything else on a general reference sheet that comes with the game; the sheet also lists a few interesting facts about each "planet." The rulebook is as educational as the game, if you'd care to learn the rules in English, Spanish, French, and German.

Two to five players can play, and a game takes about half an hour, not the quarter-hour the rules suggest. (If only two play, each player receives two Space Commander ID Cards and plays both colors.) Needless to say it's educational, and if you're behind on learning your planetary order, you'll remember it after one iteration of this. The mechanics work strategy quietly into what would otherwise be a straightforward (read: dull) game. The game runs almost automatically by the end since by that point your plays will be more or less determined by what little is left to play (or play on), but long before then you'll be confronted with pivotal choices that can make or break your score.

Once more Playroom Entertainment has brought the fun, and they've shown they can inject it into the classroom, rec room, or living room of your choice with ***Space Shuffle***.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Love, and Other Things That Go Wrong

Welcome to our jillionth annual Valentine's Day issue, a collection of articles loosely tied to the idea of love and all that good stuff.

In compiling this issue (and grumbling that one of the articles was too fat to allow another love-themed piece to fit this week), I thought about criticisms of V-Day issues past. One of the common complaints of previous years is that the articles presented are often about the seedier side of life: put loosely, things going wrong, usually in a spectacular way.

And, after much mulling and a shower, I've concluded: Yeah, pretty much.

But I realized something else . . . something that will extend, in short order to non-love-based-games, so all you snuggle-bunny-haters out there, keep the faith for a few paragraphs more. Namely: Love is normal. The default or presumed state of affairs in humanity is a mutual attraction between the sexes, leading to the continued propagation of our species. (This isn't true in the micro sense, of course . . . for example, the number of women who have no interest in me could fill a state, which I'd call "Florida.")

As a result, the bulk of interest in this common occurrence stems from complications. Things going wrong. Love not working the way it's supposed to.

Really, in a way, every romantic comedy relies on Things Going Wrong. If they didn't, they'd be five minutes long, beginning with meet cute, some wavy lines in the middle, and ending with uneventful wedding.

But – and here's where things get interesting – gaming relies on things going wrong *more*. After all, the complications of Clark Kent and Lois Lane made for what seemed like riveting comic-book drama for decades, but up until very recently in the grand scheme of things they all amounted to roughly the same basic plot: "Golly, I might be interested in Lois, but it'd be too dangerous to have her in my life any more than she already is day-in-day-out, so I need to rebuff her advances. Oh, and if she comes close to discovering my secret identity, I need to do everything in my power to preserve it, just shy of killing her. Y'know, to keep her safe."

While this conflict no doubt resonated heavily with young boys growing up in the 30s through 80s, it's nevertheless near-impossible to wrap a roleplaying game around, unless the point is to emulate those old tales (which is, obviously, part of the fun of many supers campaigns). No, roleplaying games need things to go *really* wrong before they get interesting . . . at least, interesting enough to enthrall a whole gaming group for an evening's worth of entertainment.

I like beloved; beloved likes me? No conflict.

I like beloved; beloved has doubts? No conflict.

I like beloved; beloved has needs which aren't readily addressed? No conflict.

I like beloved; beloved is secretly a soul-sucking demon sent to devour me, who's now having second thoughts and wants to turn against its dark master, resulting in a mass combat at the gates of Hell where the fate of my beloved and all humanity is at hand? Conflict.

In the general sense, roleplaying games are about things going wrong. In fact, they're usually about things going *very* wrong. For example, archeologists dig up things all the time, give papers, go to conferences, and so on. It's boring. However, sometimes things go wrong for archaeologists; someone will get buried or need to be rescued, an artifact will get lost, or weather conditions will make their jobs difficult. That's still boring; these trials are beyond the scope of satisfying roleplaying:

"One of your interns falls into a pit."

"I get a rope and rescue him."

"Roll your *archeologist (intern-saving)* skill."

"I got a nine."

"Great; you rescue him."

No, in order to build a game around an archeologist, things have to go *very* wrong. "Nazis have the Ark of the Covenant" wrong.

Fortunately, audiences for movies or books have a certain range of expectations and acceptance of some premises. For example, *The President's Plane is Missing* and *Air Force One* are both, in essence, the same movie: The president's fate is in question, and a constitutional crisis erupts as people try to hold the government together. However, the former is an example of things going wrong while the latter is an example of things going *really* wrong.

In the same way, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *Amerika* have the same plot if you squint and type real fast and hope no one notices. They both deal with a conflict of American ideals over corruption and an attack on the core values of those in power. One is a feel-good American classic and the other is a disaster. (Guess which one stars Kris Kristofferson.)

However, there isn't quite the canon of this material for romantic issues. Oh, sure, you can point to *Romeo & Juliet* and *Ladyhawke* as having the same plot: star-crossed lovers who are cursed not to spend enough time together. But one has cool shapeshifting that any gamer can relate to.

Anyway, the upshot is that it's easy to take an interesting gameable conflict and see how it relates more broadly to more mundane conditions. It's much more difficult to take a mundane condition and make it into an interesting gameable conflict.

--*Steven Marsh*

The Ashes Of Her Ladyship

Being a partial cataloging of an artifact's custodial servitors

by Michael Anguiano

The Ashes of Her Ladyship is an occult item of minor repute, purported to contain the cremated remains of a 15th century Flemish noblewoman. It is regarded in occult circles as a rather obscure artifact of uncertain potency, but otherwise has drawn little attention historically. Accounts of the urn describe it as green marble, inlaid with decorative metals; approximately 13 inches tall, six inches in diameter at its widest point, with the mouth 4.5" across; stoppered with a carved stone plug of an unidentified black material, similar to obsidian in appearance but with a surface texture suggestive of eggshell. The black stopper is sealed in place and cannot be removed without destroying the neck of the urn. Descriptions of the metal inlay, both in material and design, are contradictory.

The most complete accounts of the urn ascribe it to Mancius Glabrio. An Italian sculptor and artist, Glabrio is known to have arrived in Bolougne in 1438 and to have fallen deeply in love with Lady Godeleva, the beautiful wife of Lord Bertulf, a prominent Flemish nobleman of wicked and brutish repute. After several years of this decorously unconsummated courtly romance, Glabrio was commissioned to produce two matching urns by Bertulf. A week after the urns' completion, Godeleva died tragically, trampled to death in Bertulf's stables. The heartbroken Glabrio disappeared within days. Bertulf had Godeleva cremated, deposited her ashes in one of the urns, and displayed it prominently in his manor. He displayed the other urn alongside it, with only the smirking explanation that the two should naturally be together forever. Bertulf died eight years later, poisoned by an angry mistress. Both urns disappeared. Only one of the urns has since resurfaced, allegedly the container of Godeleva's remains.

The urn has passed through many hands over the years, often with complete ignorance as to its nature. The most distinguished of its custodians have usually referred to the urn as the Ashes of Her Ladyship and allegedly derived various protections in association with it. Such a custodian is typically a male in his late twenties, who suffered a crushing heartbreak shortly before possessing the urn. This custodian goes on to a notable career as an occult investigator and never has another serious romantic relationship.

The Minister

Denmark Whitcomb received a good education and little else from his parents, who came from the poorer branch of an otherwise prosperous and respected family in Savannah, Georgia, in the years shortly before the Civil War. Known as "Dane" to his friends and associates, he also became known as a failed teacher, a failed minister, a failed businessman, and by the age of 25 was well on his way to becoming a failed farmer. Despite an able mind and a keen grasp of scholarship, Dane lacked the wherewithal or self-assurance to make a sustained success of any trade. In the end, Dane was far along the path of drinking himself to an early death, until the fortuitous misfortune of a distant cousin.

Dane was contacted by a distant branch of the family who offered him a proposition. Dane accepted. He packed his few belongings and traveled immediately to Richmond, Virginia, abandoning his small farm to the imminent foreclosure. In Richmond, he was met by his 16-year-old second cousin, Evelyn Clayton, and the two were married in a brief and hurried service. Immediately afterwards, Dane and Evelyn were shipped off to Mobile, Alabama, accompanied by her voluminous luggage and two slaves, Mary Harvey and Increase Shipman. In starting this new life in Alabama, it was made known to the locals that Dane and Evelyn had been married for two years and were expecting their first child within six months.

This was Dane's part of the bargain. He would provide a respectable life and name for the Claytons' prodigal daughter and her impending child. In return, he would receive a very substantial dowry and a sinecure position that would keep him respectably employed. Additionally, he would gain the ownership of Mary and Increase, reliable servants who had been with the Clayton family for 20 years, ever since the two were purchased as teens.

Of course, Mary and Increase were really there for Evelyn's sake. Mary would handle housework and cooking, as she had been doing for most of her adult life, and would also assist Evelyn with the child. Increase, for his part, had worked mostly in the stables and was expected simply to use his powerful physique to protect Evelyn and keep Dane in line, when so instructed by Mary.

Just days after their arrival and the purchase of a new house, Dane was hired as an associate editor at the local newspaper, which was owned by a friend of Evelyn's mother. Dane seized upon this opportunity to reinvent himself and devoted himself fully to his newspaper duties, with a competence that surprised his co-workers almost as much as it surprised himself. Dane had also become smitten with Evelyn, a lovely young woman with a fiery temperament, and decided that if only he could win her over, if only he could comfort her and provide for his new family, then he will have earned this a new chance at life. Evelyn, for her part, regarded Dane as one more detail of the miserable fate that had been thrust upon her.

After two months in Mobile, however, Dane was abruptly stricken gravely ill. He spent several days on the brink of death before beginning a slow recovery. Mary fed and nursed him, constantly at his side, while Evelyn would visit his sickbed daily, reading to him from books and newspapers. After several weeks of convalescence, he regained his health and returned to work with renewed enthusiasm, having freshly fallen in love with his wife. She, in return, seemed to regard him at least cordially and he strengthened his determination to win her over completely.

On the other hand, he did not notice that Mary and Increase became much cooler towards Evelyn. Indeed, Dane would never learn that Evelyn had tried to poison him, and only Mary's intervention had saved his life.

A few months later, Evelyn went into labor. The child was stillborn and Evelyn died of complications in the delivery.

Dane lapsed into a downward spiral of depression, drunkenness, and self-pity, hardly noticing when he was dismissed from his job. Mary scrambled to cover household expenses as best she could, but Dane's accounts quickly ran dry and his credit was soon overdrawn. Mary had begun to despair of a solution when Increase simply handed her sufficient money to resolve immediate problems.

Increase had not been idle in recent months; he had become a resurrectionist. He would collect fresh cadavers and deliver them to the medical school at the university, where vivisection remained the most basic and necessary tool for teaching human anatomy to medical students. Increase's work earned him good money, because the cadavers were usually collected from fresh graves, making the work very illegal, not to mention unpopular and sometimes dangerous.

Mary was practical enough that her sense of propriety was only briefly offended. And so, while Dane drifted through an alcoholic haze of lassitude and misery, the Whitcomb household subsisted for a year on the harvesting of graves. For additional profit, Increase occasionally brought items "liberated" from the body before delivery, which Mary would discreetly sell or trade for goods.

One of these items was a strange green urn. On an odd impulse, Mary placed the urn as decoration in Dane's room while he lay drunk and asleep. That night, Dane dreamed of Evelyn, who spoke to him of her love and her remorse for not treating him better. When he awoke, he was a changed man. Rather than doubt and self-pity, Dane was filled with the confidence and certainty of a man who knows he is loved. He put aside alcohol and set about putting himself and his life back in order.

A week after his recovery had begun, an ashen-skinned stranger called on the Whitcomb house while Increase was away on an errand in town. Dressed in an ill-fitting brown suit, the stranger requested, and then began demanding, the return of "Her Ladyship." His gray face seemed shadowed even in the midday sun as he became increasingly agitated, threatening Mary in a voice that grew hysterical. Dane, hearing the commotion, rushed to her assistance. Upon seeing Dane, the stranger instantly calmed. "This choice shall be unmade," the man growled, then turned on his heel and departed.

Increase, upon his return, was told of the curious intrusion. After soliciting more details, Increase grew agitated and admitted that the description fit the cadaver from which he had taken the urn. After a moment of thought, Dane said, "I

must sleep on this," and left them. He returned an hour later and directed Increase and Mary to begin packing. Thus began a flight westward by train, by carriage, and by horseback, into the frontier territories.

During their travels, Dane revealed that Evelyn spoke to him in his dreams, using the urn as a conduit to reach him from the afterlife. Evelyn had warned him about the ashen-faced man, Dane said, and she was teaching him about arcane and occult matters to help them protect themselves. Dane also gave Increase and Mary their papers of manumission, granting their legal freedom from slavery. He wept as he begged their forgiveness, swore that he owed them his very life, and pledged to spend all of his days trying to make up his debt to them. Increase and Mary were, frankly, a little embarrassed.

Meanwhile, the newspapers in Mobile were filled with shocking stories of Denmark Whitcomb and his crew of despicable graverobbers. Rewards were posted for his capture and return. His vacant house was burned to the ground by a righteous mob. Local ministers lamented his escape westward, beyond the reach of civilized authorities, and prayed that he would meet a just and deserving fate at the hands of Indians and desperadoes.

The three of them continue to travel the American West in Dane's belief that the ashen-faced man continues to pursue them. Mary handles practical matters, Increase deals with the heavy lifting, and Dane provides a growing expertise in occult matters. Indeed, Dane is becoming something of a scholar in the legends and beliefs of the various native peoples. At Dane's behest, the three of them pursue supernatural events and rumors of the arcane. Mary and Increase regard Dane as slightly insane with his dreams of Evelyn, but think of it as a vast improvement over the pathetic drunk they had once known.

The Finder

In the 1920s, the job of Pullman Porter was one of the best occupations available to an African-American. He served as a combination of porter and valet to the various passengers of a train's Pullman sleeping car. The Pullman Porter was always an African-American male and traditionally addressed as "George" (after George Pullman), thus encouraging the passengers to comfortably regard the porter as a faceless servant. The work was physically demanding and often demeaning, but the pay was (relatively) good. Additionally, the Pullman Porter was a respected figure in the black community, welcomed along his travels as a bearer of news and events.

Thus George Arceneaux found himself in a comfortable situation in 1927, well-established in his job as a Pullman Porter. He was well-liked by passengers and co-workers, who found him charming, congenial and efficient. He had girlfriends in every major city and a few stops in between. He had buddies in every jook joint that was worth visiting along the rail line. He made a tidy bit of cash on the side, moving the odd "package" from place to place for friends in less legally accepted professions. And (as he liked to joke to friends) white people even called him by his first name.

And so George was taken completely by surprise when the lovely Miss Kay rode into his life. A Japanese expatriate who spoke English with an Oxford accent, Keiko Taniguchi was an educated and self-possessed woman of independent means, who saw no point in returning to Japan and to her pompous idiot husband. During a long haul from Los Angeles to Chicago, Kay struck up a conversation with George and the two got along famously. George found Kay disarmingly forthright and unpretentious, with no dynamic of racial tension underlying their interactions. When he got off the train in Chicago, she continued on to New York, but their paths crossed again a month later. George discovered that she was an inveterate train traveler and she had actually been living in one train car or another for the past year.

In subsequent meetings, George learned that Kay was something of a dealer in antique curios, especially occult items. At some stops, she would be visited on the train by unsavory and disturbing characters, who would stay only long enough for a short whispered discussion and the exchange of a small parcel for a small bundle of money. He later learned that this was the means by which she supported herself and her endless travels by train. The two saw more of each other over the following months and gradually went from friends to lovers.

By the end of the year, George could not deny that he had fallen head over heels for Kay.

Kay eventually confided that the beginnings of her collection had been stolen from her pompous idiot husband. In retaliation, her husband had set forces in motion against her, forcing her to return or face a gruesome death. To escape this, she explained to George, she had constructed a ward that shielded her from those forces' attention. Unfortunately, her skills were not so great as her husband's, so she had to include certain elements to lend sufficient strength to her warding. The most important of these arcane elements was keyed to "living between steel." This, she explained, was why she lived on trains. Indeed, he noticed that she never left the train, except to transfer directly to another train.

Although he was never sure whether to believe her story, George soon found himself helping her. He arranged meetings, carried packages, delivered papers to the various banks where she held accounts, and did other assorted things that were not easily done from inside the train. Soon she was doing well enough to bring him into the business full-time, and he left behind his life as a porter. He became familiar with the network of occult dealers through the country, who knew him as Kay's trusted representative.

This arrangement lasted three years, until an unfortunate train ride along the New England coastline. Kay had sent George to a particular shop to meet a collector, who insisted on haggling at length over various matters before finally settling the deal and handing George the parcel. Upon his return to the station, George discovered that he'd missed the train's departure. Per their standard arrangements, George simply traveled separately to the next station, sending a wire message ahead that he would meet her there.

The message arrived, but the train never did. A bridge trestle had collapsed as the train passed, causing most of the cars to derail into the cold waters below. Scores of passengers had drowned, with many of the bodies unrecovered because of the current. Keiko Taniguchi was never found.

George realized that Kay's ward had been nullified when her car had derailed. He immediately got very, very drunk. That evening, he opened the parcel and took out the green urn that Kay had sent him to pick up. With it, he found assorted papers that gave him control of Kay's various accounts around the country, including several he didn't know about. He also found a letter from the collector, explaining that he'd delayed George at Kay's request.

That night, George dreamed of Kay. When he awoke, he immediately went to the sight of the crash and joined the recovery effort. When the opportunity presented itself, he examined the bridge trestle and quickly realized it had been sabotaged. Several key timbers had been nearly worn (or gnawed) through, although no other timbers showed similar marks. With the regular traffic over this bridge, damage sufficient to ensure collapse could not have been done more than a day or two in advance. The official verdict, of course, was "act of God."

In his dreams, Kay had promised him that answers could be found. Using Kay's money and his own connections, George set himself to finding the right people to ask those questions. He might not know the powers that be, but he knew how to find the people that work for them.

The Scourge

Maxwell Ian Bennett is a dark-haired Caucasian man in his early 30s who has very sharp memories of the past fifteen years and very little before that. He presumes this is an effect of his training and conditioning as an agent . . . a presumption which, he suspects, is also an effect of his training and conditioning. He was, to the best of his recollection, recruited sometime around college, when he had a different name, a different face, and probably different fingerprints. Since achieving status as a full agent, he has amassed a sterling record and a disturbingly high body count.

Max is employed by the Office of Executive Utility. The OEU is a tiny administrative footnote in the U.S. Dept. of Interior, ostensibly established to facilitate flexibility of official communications with specific parallel offices in assorted departments and agencies. These parallel offices were never established, leaving the OEU to appear as the useless first step in an abandoned plan.

Of course, high-ranking intelligence and law enforcement personnel have reason to suspect otherwise. They consider the OEU to be a black ops asset, with an unknown chain of command and an inexplicable ability to produce the

authorization necessary for any operation. In these circles, the OEU is suspected to be a vehicle for direct Presidential action.

The truth, naturally, is a bit more convoluted and unclear. The OEU is an operational arm of an Illuminati-esque conspiracy group, possibly even the shared tool of several groups. Nobody seems to be sure. Large segments of the staff are co-opted or repurposed from other groups or agencies and consequently don't realize that they even work for the OEU. Max is part of a corps of agents, probably several dozen, that operates directly for the OEU leadership and is more aware of its true nature.

Although sufficiently skilled in all useful areas, Max's best skills are in handguns, urban tactics, and being a jerk. With this skill profile, Max has been designated as one of the "Obvious," a class of agents whose nature is generally made apparent by their appearance as the archetypal "man in black." The Obvious serve to intimidate and to distract, drawing attention away from other agents on the same operation. The Obvious agent is, therefore, the obvious target.

This suits Max just fine. In his experience, most problems can be solved by finding the right person to shoot.

Of course, knowingly working for The Conspiracy (whichever it may be) is an exercise in serenity. Max's mental and emotional landscape has been thoroughly explored and mapped over the many years of training and conditioning, so that every order and communication is thoroughly calculated to achieve a specific desired effect. Or so he assumes. On the other hand, maybe it's all crap and they've just brainwashed him into thinking that he's completely predictable and totally under their control. Or maybe it's six of one, half a dozen of the other. It's hard to say, really, so eventually he just stopped caring. He simply did his job and worked his way up.

Miriam changed that. She was everything in life that he'd never noticed missing. That she was another agent made things tricky, but not impossible. She was a "Viral," specializing in infiltration and subversion. She was beautiful, smart, charming, sweet, witty, and extremely dangerous. He was never sure what she saw in him, and he was careful not to ask. The last thing he wanted was for her to realize he was a jerk.

A year later, the two were secretly married. Five years later, she was dead.

Max was never entirely clear on what had led up to the end, he only knew the end itself. Miriam had been sent undercover for an extended mission. Seven months passed without word from her, but that was the nature of the job, so Max didn't worry. Then he received word that she had been exposed, leaving him to fear the worst. With a quick flurry of phone calls, Max exercised authority that he'd never had and found out the details of Miriam's assignment.

He had been right to fear the worst: Miriam was being held by the operational arm of an OEU rival.

Max traveled to the holding facility by the most direct route possible, commandeering any civilian or military vehicle necessary. Over the several hours of the trip, Max also made assorted phone calls to scramble every SWAT and commando team he could reach. Just for the hell of it, he ordered in the Coast Guard, too.

Meanwhile, at the holding facility, they knew that Max was coming. They had no idea why, but they knew it was a dangerous sign for the OEU to move an agent against them directly, especially one of the Obvious. The scrambled police and military units suggested an attempt to divert security away from the OEU's actual assault force. Given the sheer volume of the units Max had scrambled, tactical analysis indicated an OEU assault on a massive scale, requiring wholesale relocation of security forces to the rear perimeters.

Max arrived at the front gates to virtually no opposition and walked directly into the facility's main building. A small army of police and military followed him, under orders from a dozen different jurisdictions. Once inside, the swat teams were detailed to securing the water supply, while the military units were assigned to take and hold the highest tactical positions possible. Max simply worked his way down through the detention levels and shot anything that got in his way. He lost count of how many times he reloaded.

The facility security office was, of course, having a meltdown. Their security forces were completely unable to find the OEU assault forces in the rear perimeters, while the front perimeter had been totally breached. Tactical analysis

suggested that the water supply was being compromised to unknown purposes (although clearly connected to the Coast Guard's expected arrival), that aerial assault units were imminent, and that detention security had completely broken down.

In the lowest levels of the detention areas, Max "persuaded" several guards to lead him to a particular prisoner. He found Miriam in an interrogation room, chained, dazed and bloody. Max unchained her, told her how much he loved her, held her close, and put a bullet through her brain.

As Max left the building, several OEU agents arrived and took him into custody. He was whisked away for debriefing while the facility was searched and the situation sorted out. Max was brought before a board of his superiors and thoroughly chewed out. Miriam had been captured and therefore compromised, so Max had been obligated under standard procedures to bring her back to the OEU for "decommissioning." This would have involved a lengthy debriefing to ascertain the degree to which Miriam had compromised the OEU, followed by drug-assisted torture to confirm the veracity of the debriefing information, followed by termination.

Max didn't care in the least, and they knew it. Rather than wasting further resources, they simply put him back to work.

That night, Max dreamed of Miriam. She spoke to him and comforted him. He awoke in a cold sweat with a pistol in his hand and immediately searched his entire apartment. In his closet, he found a green urn, which he threw out the window. That done, he searched the apartment again before going back to sleep.

The next night, he dreamed again of Miriam, who was troubled by his actions. He awoke, found the urn, and threw it down the elevator shaft.

The urn reappeared in his apartment the next day. With a sigh, Max went to sleep and spoke to Miriam, who was now quite angry. Max explained patiently that she was dead, therefore her presence meant that suffering a preprogrammed reaction that was instilled during his training and conditioning. Or he might be going insane. Neither was an acceptable option. The green urn was clearly connected to this, so eliminating the urn was the quickest way to eliminate the problem.

Miriam countered that the urn was the only conduit she had to speak to him, but that it allowed her to "motivate" others to return it to him. She wasn't simply going to abandon him, so he'd better get over it. In the end, they struck a deal. She would prove her usefulness with information and insight about others, and he would keep the urn. Max still suspects that Miriam's presence is some kind of subconscious coping mechanism, but he's willing to let it be for now.

In the months since Miriam's death, Max's reputation has grown substantially among other agents. Indeed, he has become much more dangerous, with an improved sense of focus and an unflappable attitude. His marksmanship has improved as well, leading some to refer to him as a "one-hit wonder," supposedly able to unerringly hit and kill most opponents with a single shot. By the same token, his superiors are reluctant to use him on OEU operations, as he has become something of a wild card. Consequently, Max has been mostly assigned to missions outside the OEU, often involving investigations of weird science phenomena or the supernatural.

Meanwhile, Max is still trying to figure out who is responsible for his current situation. He believes that whoever ordered Miriam's final mission is the one who exposed her, which would have the obvious effect of sending Max on a collision course with Miriam's captors. If he can penetrate the OEU's control structure, he and Miriam might just find someone to pay the price for her death.

Inside The Urn

The urn has a long and odd history, which has been noted in piecemeal fragments in a wide variety of odd places. The common speculation is that the urn is the Ashes of Her Ladyship, containing the cremated remains of Lady Godeleva of Bolougne. Further speculation is that the urn allows communication between a custodial servitor and the spirit of his deceased beloved. Some even suggest that a matching urn exists, the Ashes of Her Love, which contains the cremated remains of Mancius Glabrio. These speculations are incorrect. The urn itself is a simple piece of carved marble,

containing the cremated remains of a dog. The black stopper is the repository vessel for an ancient spirit that intermittently requires a symbiotic psychic relationship with a male host.

The most authoritative accounts of the urn's history come from the custodial servitors themselves. This is disinformation, intentionally spread by the urn's reposing spirit. As with any artifact, a number of collectors have been seeking it for years or decades. Some are willing to resort to rather extreme methods to acquire it, but the urn's repository spirit consistently rejects them as unsuitable hosts.

The reposing spirit derives nourishment from the symbiotic relationship it forges with the chosen host. To strengthen this relationship, the spirit presents itself through the host's dreams in the persona of a lost beloved, thus creating an emotional resonance with the host. The host's own memories and expectations are used to reinforce the illusion. Once accepted, the spirit will remain in contact with the host until the host's eventual death. The host's proximity to the urn is helpful but not necessary once the connection is established.

The servitor host does gain benefits aside from emotional comfort. The host is shielded by the spirit from various forms of possession, charm, beguiling, or hypnosis. Also useful is the spirit's arcane knowledges and insight into the world around it. The spirit has some limited ability to influence others directly, but will do this only in exigent circumstances. For instance, from time to time, the urn will be damaged or destroyed, at which point the spirit will simply compel a suitable artisan to manufacture a similar-looking replacement to fit the black stopper.

The reposing spirit is rarely completely honest with the host, even aside from the false identity. The spirit safeguards its interests by spreading false and inconsistent information about its nature, often finding it necessary to withhold information from its own host. For example:

- Dane, Increase, and Mary are being pursued by a powerful ghoul of a type previously unknown to the urn's spirit. The ghoul wishes to be the spirit's chosen host and servitor, but it is unsuitable because of its corrupt nature as well as its very awareness of the spirit's nature. The spirit is unwilling to tell Dane that the ghoul has murdered (and eaten) three previous servitors.
- Keiko Taniguchi is not dead. The spirit has determined that after Keiko's car was derailed and she was thrown into the water, she was captured by the waiting members of a subhuman race, possibly in service to Keiko's husband. Rather than allow George to discover this, the spirit will simply mislead his pursuit. If necessary, the spirit will contact Keiko's husband and bargain to have Keiko eliminated.
- Max is one of the least suitable servitors the spirit has ever chosen; he's certainly the most unaccepting. Consequently, their symbiotic connection is the weakest the spirit has ever known. The spirit cannot simply replace him and it is unwilling to actively seek his death, so it will simply conserve its energy rather than make active efforts to help him.

Adventure Seeds

The Ashes of Her Ladyship is a useful plot device for any campaign involving occult elements, even if only tangentially (a la Indiana Jones). The urn can be used in virtually any time period (despite the bogus origin story), either on its own or in the possession of a custodial servitor. The urn can be an objective for the PCs to acquire for a suitably mysterious employer, or the PCs can try to gain the urn for their own occult benefit . . . although any male PC with romantic attachments should beware! A custodial servitor of the urn can be a useful NPC resource for the PCs, providing information or motivation as needed to facilitate a scenario.

Weird West: Bring me the headstone of Alfredo Garcia! The urn is lost in a train robbery and the PCs are hired to track it down. The PCs trail the robbers travel south of the border, where the robbers hand over the goods to a bandit leader, Elaudio Flores. The PCs discover that a mysterious collector had paid Flores to send men to rob the train and get the urn. After accepting the substantial payment, Flores shoots the collector and takes the rest of his money. With a cruel grin, the bandit leader has the still-bleeding collector buried with the urn, then rides away with his band of men. Sensible PCs will wait until Flores has gone and night has fallen, then sneak into the graveyard with shovels to recover the urn. However, the ashen-faced collector is not willing to part with the urn that easily

Call of Cthulhu: Hurtling towards collapse! Hired to recover the urn, the PCs are set on the trail of Kay Taniguchi. After several false leads, they discover that Taniguchi is traveling by train and manage to catch it at the next stop. Unfortunately, they don't know which car she's in and none of the train's staff will help them out. Unless the PCs choose to break down every door on the entire train, they have to wait until the next stop, where they spot Kay Taniguchi with her assistant, George. Luckily, George has been delayed at the station and misses the train, so they have a chance to spot Taniguchi's car and catch her alone. They're not the only ones, though, as two other teams have boarded and are racing (and fighting) through the train to get to Taniguchi first. Whoever gets to her car first has the dubious pleasure of experiencing a derailing traincar from the inside, as the bridge collapses and sends them all into the waters below. And if they survive the fall, there are things in the water that want Taniguchi even more than the PCs. Pity that the urn is still back at the station, in George's hands!

Illuminati: And the cat came back . . . The PCs are tasked to take possession of the urn. After tracing the urn's long and contradictory background, they reach a completely dead end. A casual glance at a supermarket tabloid, *The Illuminator*, shows the urn in the hands of a man in black, under the screaming headline, "Secret Gov't Agency Plots To Control Texas Using US Coast Guard!" The heroes track down the *Illuminator's* publisher, then the reporter who wrote the story (totally bogus), then the photographer who took the pictures (partially faked), until they locate the place where the man in black was seen holding the urn. The PCs are somewhat at a loss until they spot the man, Max, watching them from a nearby building, talking on a cell phone. "They're here," he says flatly, then hands the phone to the nearest PC, saying, "It's for you." On the phone is their employer, who tells them to bring the urn but under no circumstances to harm Max. If they attempt to kill him and fail (or worse, if they succeed), the results would be catastrophic. The PCs can steal, buy, or simply ask for the urn, and Max will let them have it . . . but it will slip away from their possession before they can deliver it. This will continue as long as the PCs are willing to try. If they admit this development to their employer, then the PCs will be tasked to accompany Max until he dies *entirely* at *someone else's* hands. The PCs will then have to follow a smirking Max as he goes about his daily work, which is rather like combining *The X-Files* with *The Matrix* . . .

Martial Arts of Yrth

for *GURPS*

by David Moore

Aside from noting that Judo and Karate "are known and taught in Sahud, but nowhere else," (p.F113) *GURPS Fantasy* has little to say about the martial arts. Ytarria is a large place, however, with many cultures, and not all formal combat styles are Asian. People drifting into Yrth from Earth over the last millennium, despite the efforts of the Ministry of Serendipity and their ilk, gradually import new ideas, including the proliferation of modern styles. Furthermore, the nonhuman races of Yrth have their own combat disciplines, or adapted them from observations of human styles. This article expands on the sidebar "Fantasy: The Land of Yrth" (p. MA140), adding seven new styles unique to Yrth (but adaptable to any fantasy setting).

Using styles from *GURPS Martial Arts*

Most of the martial arts in Yrth are imported from Earth, preserved with some alteration down to the modern day. The nation of Sahud is influenced by "samurai" disciplines like Jujutsu, Kenjutsu and Kyudo and Korean arts like Tae Kwon Do and Kuk Sool Won. However, the GM should avoid compromising the mystique of Sahud by making Sahudese styles too familiar; at the very least, the *rules* of formal High War tournaments should be so bewildering that even a skilled combatant may lose on a technicality. In Megalos and Caithness, traditional Western combat disciplines are ancient and refined. The knight, especially, is trained from boyhood in many different types of combat and is a truly fearsome warrior. Volker Bach's excellent articles ["The Western Way of War"](#) and ["Vechte Unde Schirmen"](#) offer inspiration for a GM or player interested in the armed combat disciplines of Ytarrian chivalry. By way of bare-fisted fighting, the Greek wrestling art of Pancratium is well-known in Megalos and a regular feature in the arenas of Christendom. In the Principality of Araterre, the preferred weapons are the Renaissance smallsword and foil; both French and Italian Fencing are available. An unarmed style resembling Savate is fought in the docks of Sauvons, either imported by late arrivals or evolving in parallel with its Earth counterpart.

Notoriously, the Assassin sect high in Western al-Haz (p.F31) utilizes the Hashishin Style; the Balikites use similar tactics under al-Garyhan (p.F78). The Kharijites and Islamic chivalric Orders (p.F30 and p.F32 respectively) study knightly arts very similar to their Christian counterparts (use Early Knightly Mounted Combat from "The Western Way of War"), while wrestling and swordplay techniques are also popular, and central to the Great Games (p.F85). The boiling pot that is Cardiel's mixed cultural heritage applies as much to combat as to everything else, as the aristocracy pursues knightly skills while local communities practice arts imported from all over Yrth, and some known nowhere else in the world. With an appropriate Unusual Background, a Cardien martial artist could justify virtually any style out the book. The Chinatown community in East Tredroy, centering on the Street of Gadgeteers, is home to a handful of schools of Kung Fu, although their students do not make their skills very public and it would be extremely unusual for any non-Chinese to be invited to study them. Nonhuman disciplines exist as well. Sylvan War Lore is, in the lands bordering on Elf territory, renowned and feared, and Neal Byles' article ["Beyond Sylvan War Lore"](#) tackles a handful of other martial arts equally within the Elven idiom. While a few orcs have the patience and aptitude to master the brutal and little-known Smasha, simple and unscientific brawling is the rule, except for the handful who have the resources to pursue human teachings.

New Styles

Ars Clemens

8 points (No Cinematic Abilities)

Developed in the 1960s by the Cardien Order of the Archangel Michael under then Prince Johannes of Alimar, this style is now taught to agents in all three national branches of the Order. Although it is formally called simply

"wrestling" within the Order, its nickname -- literally "the Kind Art," a faintly ironic label coined by the Megalan underworld due to its emphasis on nonlethal but crippling attacks -- has stuck, and is used with some pride by Michaelite practitioners. The style may have been influenced by imported ideas from Earth law enforcement along with fingerprinting and other modern police techniques (see *Criminology*, p.F113).

Ars Clemens training has two primary aims. The first is to subdue the opponent without killing him, using grapples, locks and disarming tactics. While Yrth justice is somewhat tolerant of the death of a fugitive, it is still preferable to bring a criminal to trial. Serious injury is less anxiously avoided, since magical healing is generally available once the suspect has been pacified; knives and short clubs are taught as part of the style. The second aim is to prepare the wrestler to fight a mage or supernatural combatant without magical defences of his own. To that end, the Michaelite is taught techniques to bolster his mind against Mind Control spells, along with a repertoire of attacks intended to blind, silence, distract or inflict pain upon an opponent so as to hinder his spell-casting capability. Some familiarity with the theory and practice of magic is also offered, so the wrestler can identify and be prepared for offensive spells.

Note: There is no Cinematic version of this martial art, even in campaigns where Cinematic styles are permitted. Although Clemens is known and feared, there are no accounts of wrestlers demonstrating superhuman feats, while the style's emphasis on simple, effective techniques precludes much in the way of enlightenment.

Primary Skills: Brawling, Mind Shield, Wrestling.

Secondary Skills: Knife, Short Sword, Thaumatology.

Optional Skills: Body Language, Boxing, Knife Throwing.

Maneuvers: Arm Lock [1 point], Choke Hold, Disarming (from DX), Eye Gouging, Face Attacks.

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: None.

Beserker Raging

10 points/11 points

In the sparse and bitter plains of the northern Nomad Lands, the traditions of many of Earth's tribal and nomad cultures have mixed and grown together. The renowned *Berserkers*, the "Bear Shirt" cult, is one of the fruits of this blend: a holdover from Viking society, influenced by Celtic and Mongolian mysticism. Animistic warriors who deliberately cultivate mindless frenzies, Berserkers believe they spiritually transform into bears when they fight, gaining strength from their totem. They see themselves as holy men in their own right, acknowledging the druids and shamans of the Nomad Lands as equals; a few genuine weres in the cult are revered as singularly blessed. The cult lies outside normal Nomad culture, kneeling to no king or chieftain and accepting no payment but plunder for their aid in battle, but are respected throughout the peninsula as honorable, courageous and spiritual (treat this as a Reputation +1 throughout Nomad Lands (large group, 3 points) and a Claim to Hospitality).

Training revolves wholly around the Berserk disadvantage, which is required to learn the style. Since a raging Berserker would never use a shield, practitioners learn to fight with swords and axes in both hands, and how to fight up close with an enemy when those weapons are lost. A knife in the boot or scabbarded on the thigh is the universal last resort, and Berserkers train to draw and attack with them until it becomes second nature, to ensure they are not unarmed while the battle-rage is on them. Finally, the Berserker learns how to harness the frenzy itself, calling upon it when needed. Some are reputed to gain terrific strength and resilience from the frenzy, even to a supernatural degree.

Advantages and Disadvantages: The Berserk disadvantage is compulsory; a PC who does not yet suffer from the disadvantage must acquire it, spending accumulated points as though buying an advantage. Toughness is a common trait. This style has no Cinematic Skills, since it is impossible for a Berserking warrior to take the Concentrate maneuver; however, at the GM's discretion, a Berserker may purchase the Hyper-Strength, Extra Hit Points, Hard to Kill or Damage Reduction advantages with the limitation "Only while Berserk" (-15%). The *GURPS Celtic Myth* advantage Spearman's Invulnerability (p.CM80), with the same limitation, is particularly appropriate.

Primary Skills: Axe/Mace, Brawling, Broadsword, Fast-Draw (Knife), Knife.

Secondary Skills: Axe-Throwing, Running, Theology (Nomad), Wrestling.

Optional Skills: Armoury, Boating, Swimming.

Maneuvers: Close Combat (Knife), Head Butt, Knee Strike, Off-Hand Weapon Training (Axe/Mace or Broadsword),

Trigger Beserk.

Cinematic Skills: None.

Cinematic Maneuvers: Dual-Weapon Attack (Axe/Mace or Broadsword).

Dwarven Bladecraft

10 points/22 points

All young dwarves in Zarak and the Whitehoods train in the use of the axe, and most serve terms in the ranks of the guard forces that patrol the entrances. In spite of this, dwarves who focus extensively on combative skills are rare, since Dwarven beliefs place importance on creation, and battle creates nothing. The few exceptions, the "Brothers of the Blade" (although the group contains several Dwarf women), combine study of the axe's use in battle with study of the weapon itself; a Brother must create his own axe as part of his training, and practitioners often become skilled weaponsmiths. Beautiful and distinctive weapons are valued, and Brothers often carve runes and patterns onto the blades and hafts. Since warfare is not regarded very highly in Dwarf society, mastery of Bladecraft does not earn a Dwarf recognition as a High Crafter, and Brothers tend to enter weaponsmithing clans.

The style itself focuses on holding ground. The axe is used to dominate the area around the Dwarf and keep enemies at bay. Unarmed attacks and close combat training allow the Dwarf to engage an opponent who tries to crowd him without having to withdraw; these tactics are also valuable in close tunnels. Brothers subscribe to a Dwarven philosophy called "Forbearance," whose emphasis on the Eternal (the common faith of the Elder Races, see p.F37) is directed *within*, at enduring adversity and making the self permanent. They supplement their combat training with breathing and self-control exercises. Truly skilled Brothers are said to be capable of extraordinary feats of determination and endurance.

Primary Skills: Armoury, Axe/Mace, Brawling.

Secondary Skills: Philosophy (Forbearance), Wrestling.

Optional Skills: Breath Control, Karate, Language (Dwarven Runic), Meditation, Nei Tan, Symbol Drawing.

Maneuvers: Close Combat (Axe/Mace), Elbow Strike (from Brawling-2), Hilt Strike, Knee Strike, Retain Weapon (Axe/Mace).

Special: Brothers are taught to fight in close quarters and on uneven or loose ground, and may reduce penalties for fighting under such circumstances by 2. This is a special ability costing 4 points.

Cinematic Skills: Body Control, Breaking Blow (Axe/Mace), Immovable Stance, Mental Strength, Mountain Heart, Power Blow (Axe/Mace).

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Parry (Axe/Mace).

Note: A small group of Brothers focus on unarmed combat over axe-fighting. For "Handcraft," use the above, making Karate and Wrestling Primary Skills and Armoury and Axe/Mace Secondary, adding Arm Lock and Roundhouse Punch, and using the standard versions of Breaking Blow and Power Blow and the unarmed version of Enhanced Parry. Handcraft costs 12 points to learn (24 points for the Cinematic version).

Emulating the Dragon

8 points/12 points

The few who are brave or reckless enough to have observed both races and survived know that Reptile Men and Dragons appear to honor a vague kinship, although whether grounded in distant common ancestry or mere cosmetic similarity is uncertain. To a feared sect among the Reptile Men of the Great Desert, however, this kinship is far from vague: they actually worship Dragons, fanatically insistent that the beasts are the ancestors and gods of their kind. They believe that the ruined cities of the desert are remnants of a great Dragon Empire that once ruled Ytarria and enslaved the Elves and Orcs, brought low by Elvish wizardry and treachery. Their shaman-kings seek to regain some of this lost glory through fear, leading their tribes in bloody raids against the communities along the desert's border, displaying a shocking and casual violence that horrifies the survivors. There are even rumors that one or more Dragons may be in league with the rogue tribes, encouraging the worship and ensuing violence to further goals of their own.

"Emulating the Dragon" is the training the most devout warriors of the sect undergo. Eschewing weapons, the Reptile Men strive to return to the tactics of their Dragon "ancestors." Dragon warrior tactics are to close on and grapple their enemies, simultaneously biting and tearing with their powerful legs. They also seek the Dragon's traditional ability to

terrify, roaring and stamping to scare their enemies into submission. Fierceness is combined with subtlety: warriors put their enemies off with slow advances and sudden attacks, or conceal themselves and seize their foes from concealment. The greatest warriors supposedly gain mystical "gifts of the Dragon," enabling them to "fly" as they leap great distances from ambush and Slam their enemies, to strike fearsome blows, or to roar with such force that their enemies are actually stunned.

Note: Practitioners of this art reject weapons, believing them to weaken Reptile Men who should rely on their own natural weapons and strength. GMs may wish to enforce a compulsory Major Vow (-10 points) to use no weapons for any Reptile Men PCs who learn the style.

Primary Skills: Brawling, Intimidation, Wrestling.

Secondary Skills: Hypnotism, Stealth, Theology (Dragon Worship).

Optional Skills: Camouflage, Jumping, Naturalist, Running, Tracking.

Maneuvers: Bite, Ground Fighting (Wrestling), Hit Location (Brawling), Rake, Scratch.

Cinematic Skills: Flying Leap, Hypnotic Hands, Kiai, Power Blow.

Cinematic Maneuvers: None.

Harmony

9 points/15 points

The philosophy of the Halfling people is one of simplicity: be prudent but not profound, generous but not spendthrift, hardworking but not self-denying. Always fulfill your obligations, and know when not to take on more. Above all, try to get along; with your neighbor, the locals, and the Big People among whom you live. This philosophy extends to all parts of halfling life and is so much a part of their culture it doesn't even have a name, although it is best simply summed up as "harmony." If only the Big People could all live the same way...

The story always starts the same way. A Halfling village or community, oppressed and abused by its human rulers, prepares to defend itself, ready for the worst. One day a Halfling stranger of indeterminate age, wearing a battered blue cloak and walking with a stick, comes into town and asks for a place to stay. On the first day, he's helping out, fixing a fence or tending to a hurt sheep. By the third day, he's teaching the young men of the village how to defend themselves. He stays for a month or two, training and guiding his students, and then is gone as mysteriously as he arrived. He uses many names, but some say it's Saint Helbus, one of the first Halfling Christians and a disciple of the proselytizing St. Michael Olybrius, returned from Heaven to protect his fellows.

The style, in keeping with halfling philosophy, is simple and economic. The opponent's height and strength are used against him, and the halfling's natural stealth and grace are exploited to effect. The weapon of choice is a walking stick, around two feet in length, which is used both in attack and defense, striking at the wrists and ankles to disarm and incapacitate. Slings and a variety of thrown weapons are also used. The master himself is supposed to be capable of outlandish feats, knocking over armored men and disappearing entirely from view, but he rarely remains in one place long enough to teach these highest disciplines.

Primary Skills: Judo, Short Staff, Stealth, Throwing.

Secondary Skills: Acrobatics, Hypnotism, Philosophy (Harmony), Sling.

Optional Skills: Bow, First Aid/TL3, Herbary.

Maneuvers: Arm Lock (Judo or Short Staff) [1 point], Disarming, Hit Location (Short Staff) [2 points], Off-Hand Weapon Training (Short Staff).

Cinematic Skills: Invisibility Art, Light Walk, Pressure Points, Push, Throwing Art.

Cinematic Maneuvers: Roll With Blow.

Imperial Battle Wizard Training

5 points/6 points

The Imperial Legion makes extensive use of wizards, healing the fallen, affecting the battlefield and directly attacking the enemy with magic. These wizards are much of the reason the Imperial Legion is so effective, and much of the reason the Megalan Empire has managed to remain so large and powerful. Ideally, these wizards are kept behind their infantry's lines, shielded from direct attack and somewhat protected from archers and enemy wizards. With a

responsibility somewhere between artillery pieces and battlefield tacticians, they should have little call to engage in direct combat with the enemy.

Nevertheless, before covering military theory and war magic, all wizards are required to do "basic training," learning at least the shield, sword and spear their fellow soldiers use. On top of this, Legion wizards are trained in resisting invasive mind control magic, and in holding their concentration under distraction, keeping their minds on their spells while dodging attacks. Advanced training includes combining spells and weapons in one-to-one combat. Veteran Imperial Battle Wizards have been known to join warlike Mage's Guilds or form schools of their own, passing on the techniques pioneered by the Legion's trainers (see Peter V. Dell'Orto's ["Martial Arts for Mages"](#) for more on magical combat training).

Primary Skills: Mind Shield, Shield, Shortsword.

Secondary Skills: Tactics, Thaumatology, Wrestling.

Optional Skills: Broadsword, History (Optional Specialization: Military History), Riding, Savoir-Faire (Military), Spear.

Maneuvers: Concentrate While Defending [2 points].

Special: Imperial Battle Wizards may buy combinations (p.MA54) incorporating spells. Unless learned to a high enough level (generally 21+) that it can be cast instantly, the spell must be the first maneuver in the combination (after a turn spent concentrating). The Concentrate maneuver cannot be incorporated into combinations except in highly cinematic games. This is a feature, costing 0 points.

Cinematic Skills: None.

Cinematic Maneuvers: Simultaneous Spell Attack.

Tahtib

8 points/15 points

Brought over to Yrth by Egyptian bedouin, Tahtib is an ancient stick-fighting form practiced by the nomadic tribes of the Wazifi steppes. The *tahtib* or *asaya* is a long wooden staff, used by herders to control sheep or harding, which is turned to defense against wild animals or bandits when the need arises. Generally fought on foot with a four to six foot long staff, the style also teaches practitioners how to fight on horseback with an eight to twelve foot long pole. Both types of combat emphasize movement, with opponents circling one another constantly, keeping their exposed sides out of reach and trying to find openings in one another's defenses. Quick, light, misdirecting attacks are interspersed with more powerful blows, seeking to knock an opponent over or disarm him.

Tahtib is also a form of dance, essentially a ritualized combat fought with light staves, accompanied by the *tahvol* drum and the *oud* reed pipe. The dance can be performed wholly co-operatively, usually to a script in which one combatant "wins" the duel, or competitively, with the emphasis on technique and style rather than on landing blows. Either way, the dance is taken seriously among Wazifi tribesmen, as a social and competitive exercise. *Raqs al-Asaya*, a related "women's dance" performed with a short shepherd's crook, is performed purely for entertainment (use Broadsword Art, Dancing and Sex Appeal).

Primary Skills: Staff, Two-Handed Sword.

Secondary Skills: Brawling, Dance, Polearm, Riding, Staff Art.

Optional Skills: Animal Handling, Broadsword, Musical Instrument (Pipe or Drum), Singing.

Maneuvers: Feint (Staff) [2 points], Horseback Fighting (Staff or Polearm), Jab (Staff)*, Riposte (Staff)*, Spinning Attack (Staff)**.

Cinematic Skills: None.

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Parry (Staff), Whirlwind Attack (Staff).

*These maneuvers can only be used when using the staff as a thrusting weapon. Jab functions as per the boxing maneuver, inflicting one less damage than usual for a thrusting attack.

**As Spinning Punch, using a staff.

New Maneuvers

Bite (Average)***Brawling***

The basic bite attack. Note that humanoids must grapple enemies with both hands before biting them. Muzzled or snouted quadrupeds (the Horizontal disadvantage) or creatures with long necks can bite without grappling as a standard Close Combat attack as a zero-point feature. Damage is per the chart on p.B140, calculated for half the attacker's ST, or as per the Bite or Sharp Teeth advantage. Brawling adds its usual damage bonus.

Concentrate While Defending (Hard)***Will-3******Cannot exceed Will+1***

A spellcaster or psionic taking the Concentrate action may use this maneuver in place of his Will to try and maintain concentration if he is forced to make an Active Defense.

Hilt Strike (Average)***Boxing-2, Brawling-2 or Karate-2******Cannot exceed prerequisite skill level***

The attacker punches his opponent with his weapon hand. The hilt makes the punch awkward, but hard. Damage is thrust-1/crushing, plus any bonuses for skill. Basket hilts are specially designed for this maneuver: roll at +1 (without exceeding the prerequisite skill) and inflict thrust/crushing damage. This is a Close Combat maneuver.

Horseback Fighting (Hard)***Weapon Skill-2******Prerequisite: Any one-yard or longer weapon Weapon Skill******Cannot exceed prerequisite skill level***

This is the skill of wielding a weapon from horseback. As per p.B136, the attacker suffers a penalty of -2 if his relative speed is 6 higher than the target; trained horseback fighters may use this maneuver instead. Note that infantry are also at a -1 to defend against a horseback attacker, who in turn is at +1 to defend against infantry.

Rake (Hard)***Brawling-3******Prerequisite: Claws, Sharp Claws or Talons******Cannot exceed Brawling***

This is a powerful claw attack using the legs. The attacker must first Takedown or Slam his opponent and then grapple him with both hands, holding him down as he uses his legs to tear at the opponent's body. At the end of the attack, the attacker is prone, and must either take a turn standing or continue fighting on the ground. Damage is for a kick attack+2.

Scratch (Hard)***Brawling-2******Prerequisite: Claws, Sharp Claws or Talons******Cannot exceed Brawling+1***

This is a claw attack calculated to inflict minimal damage but draw as much blood as possible, usually to demoralize an opponent. It cannot be used against an opponent wearing armor. Roll damage normally for a hand attack; if any damage penetrates natural DR (from fur, hide or Toughness), then blood has been drawn. Regardless of the roll, a scratch never inflicts more than one point of real damage. System effects of bleeding vary at the GM's discretion. A heavily bleeding enemy or his allies may need to make Fright Checks. A scratch aimed at the Head (-5 to hit) causes blood to pour down the target's face, inflicting a vision penalty of -3 to -6. The victim should make HT rolls for blood loss per p.B130; damage from this maneuver inflicts a -1 per 3 hit points lost, not 5.

Trigger Berserk (Hard)***Will******Cannot exceed Will+3***

A character with the Berserk disadvantage may take the Concentrate action and use this maneuver in place of his Will to deliberately go berserk. Regrettably, it is of no use in trying to *snap out* of it . . .

New Cinematic Maneuver

Simultaneous Spell Attack (Average)

Spell Level-3*

Prerequisite: Any offensive spell; must specialize

Cannot exceed prerequisite skill level

As per p.B146, spells take affect at the beginning of the turn, the caster having finished concentrating the turn before. The mage may then take a normal action on the same turn, including Concentrating on another spell or making an attack. With this maneuver, unleashing the spell and attacking occur *simultaneously*. Unlike Dual-Weapon Attack (p.MA57), this maneuver does not give the caster any additional actions, but the simultaneous attacks divide the target's attention; his resistance and Active Defense rolls are both at -1. Spells learned to a high enough level to cast instantaneously may be cast with this maneuver, allowing the wizard to simultaneously attack and cast every turn.

*Note that this maneuver must be learned to be attempted; the wizard cannot simply roll against the default. The technique requires specialized training and practice.

Thomas J. Wise

A Historical Figure for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Steve Honeywell

Biography

Thomas James Wise is a man with a secret. Rising from humble beginnings, he became one of the most influential men in the world of book collecting and bibliography. For years, Wise's word was enough to verify the most unusual publication, and his guarantee of authenticity for a given work meant more than any scientific method of claiming a book or manuscript was genuine. What Wise didn't want anyone to know was that many of the works he sold were fabrications. For decades, Wise preyed on the book collecting world and duped hundreds into spending thousands of dollars on erroneous publications.

Wise was born in Gravesend, Kent on October 7, 1859 to Thomas Wise and Julia Victoria Dauncey. As a young man, Wise was employed as a clerk by Messrs. Rubeck and Co., a purveyor of "essential oils." Wise worked for the company for thirty-odd years, working his way up to the position of chief clerk and cashier before his retirement in 1912.

Wise was active both in the Shelley and Browning societies. From 1886 to 1892, he produced or oversaw 33 publications for the Shelley Society, bankrupting it. It was here that Wise learned quite a bit about both publishing and bibliography. In 1886, Wise hatched a plan to both pirate works and create spurious works. Wise continued to obtain rare books for his private collection, amassing a collection that was impressive both for the sheer number of volumes and for its completeness.

It is the fraudulent works that Wise is particularly noted for. He started with mere piracy, extracting previously unpublished poems of Shelley's from Edward Dowden's *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* and publishing them under the title *Poems and Sonnets*. Additionally, this work featured a false publisher imprint, distancing the work from Wise. He expanded the operation in 1888 by taking shorter 19th-century works that were available only in collections and creating specious "first editions." These were extremely difficult to detect by collectors simply because first editions of those works didn't actually exist for comparison. To add legitimacy to the fraudulent works, Wise donated and sold copies to the British Museum, which would then catalog the titles, lending them authenticity. Also, he sold copies of these works at auction, often buying them himself to set artificially high prices.

As Wise's reputation as a collector and bibliographer grew, he was able to produce more and more valuable fakes, selling them for increasingly high prices. Wise's bibliographies became another vehicle for him to advertise his spurious books since he listed his manufactured publications as legitimate. In 1893, he was given the task of writing the "Notes on Recent Book Sales" section of *The Bookman*, using this position to further drive up the prices of his fakes. Similarly, the published catalogues of his own collection further advertised what he owned, including all of the specious works.

As bad as this was, Wise's greatest crime is the theft of nearly 300 leaves from the collection of the British Museum. Wise would habitually purchase incomplete copies of works and "finish" them by taking the missing leaves from the British Museum's collection.

One of the most interesting parts of Wise's history is his public denunciation of forgers and pirates. In 1904, Walter T. Spencer created a fake first edition of Swinburne's *Dead Love from a Wise* forgery, and Wise himself denounced him publicly. Around this time, Forman and Wise stopped creating fake first editions, having already foisted an estimated 100 spurious publications on the collecting world.

In 1912, Wise retired from business and concentrated solely on the creation of bibliographies and on editing the letters of Swinburne and the unpublished materials of several other authors. He was named President of the Bibliographic Society in 1922 and served until 1924. In 1924, he was named a Fellow of Worcester College and in 1926 was given an honorary M.A. from Oxford.

While there had been some suspicion on some works sold by Wise, it wasn't until 1934 that Wise himself was suspected. Bibliographers John Carter and Graham Pollard published *An Enquiry into the Nature of Certain Nineteenth-Century Pamphlets*, showing that 40 to 50 pieces commanding high prices were fakes, and that many of these were dated earlier than known first editions. On all, the type, paper, and/or imprint were not genuine, and all could be traced back to Wise. Of particular note was a collection of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry dated 1847 in Wise's fake. These poems had not been shown to Robert Browning by his wife until 1849. More damning was evidence that the wood pulp in the paper contained chemicals not in use until 1874. The type in this pamphlet was compared with others ranging in "publication dates" from 1842 to 1893. In all, the type face was identical, and all used the same mismatched question mark. Naturally, this raised suspicion, since these works were listed as being created by publishers on both sides of the Atlantic over a period of 50 years.

Equally suspicious were choices made by Wise. His edition of Ruskin's *The National Gallery*, dated 1852, contains emendations not present in editions before 1880. Further, Ruskin's *The Queen's Garden*, dated 1864 by Wise, includes changes made by Ruskin in 1871. Naturally, Wise protested the inquiry, going so far as to blame the entire thing on Harry Buxton Forman, who he often worked with (and who was also implicated in the production of these publications) but Wise could produce no evidence. Wise died in 1934, leaving behind his Ashley collection. His widow sold the collection to the British Museum for a reported £66,000, which was about half its estimated value. However, 200-odd works listed in the catalog were no longer present, having been sold off to other collectors.

Using Thomas Wise

While Thomas Wise is not much of an adventurer, he makes an excellent contact in a number of situations. A rising star in the bibliography and book collecting world through the last part of the 19th Century, Wise truly comes into his own after 1912. Around this time, he is perhaps the single greatest authority on books, particularly those of the 19th Century, in the world. His bibliographies are noteworthy because of their attention to detail and completeness, and his reputation is sterling until a few months before his death in 1934.

Wise would be the contact of choice to locate and acquire any rare book or pamphlet. Because his connections are so good, he will likely be aware of the location of multiple copies of any given work, and may also know someone willing to sell a copy. Additionally, because of the relative size of his collection, Wise may possess one or more copies of a given work at any given time, and will generally be willing to part with one for the right price. He makes an excellent contact for anyone or any group who may need access to particular books over the course of a campaign.

Wise could also act as a patron for the right group. His constant desire for rare books could conceivably possess him to hire a group to obtain particular tomes for him. Such groups would be paid little, since Wise's desire is to continue to add to his collection and he'd be hard pressed to spend money elsewhere. Still, for particularly rare tomes available only in other parts of the world, he might be willing to fund an expedition.

Of course, it's much more interesting if Wise's spurious productions somehow enter the mix. The group could be contacted by a buyer of Wise's who wonders if the books he has acquired are truly the genuine article. Or the group itself might be duped by one of Wise's books either at the behest of another collector patron or on their own.

In a **Steampunk** game, Wise will still concentrate on literature, but will also deal in more exotic and technical works. While it is unlikely that he will fabricate such works, it is possible that he will produce "early" versions of particular designs or technical ideas, depending on whether or not there is interest in the book collecting market. He will undoubtedly have many such works in his collection.

A **Horror** or **Cabal** campaign makes Wise even more interesting. His ability to suddenly procure new and unknown "early" editions of works and his collection of rare books may make him a target of creatures who do not wish to have

their secrets discovered. It's important to remember that Wise's books were all taken at face value, so his reputation for discovering previously unknown books is near-legendary. Anything with a shadowy or dangerous past would risk a lot to prevent him from inadvertently uncovering some dark secret. Wise may need protection, and may go to the best, closest source for help. Conversely, Wise may be working for the Cabal either as a member or a dupe. His fabricated works could be full of misinformation to lead others astray, further cloaking his masters from prying eyes.

Thomas James Wise **155 points**

5'7", 170 lbs. (SM 0)

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 10 [0]

Dmg 1d-2 thrust, 1d swing; *BL* 20 lbs.

HP 10 [0]; *Will* 13 [0]; *Per* 13[0]; *FP* 10 [0]

Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; *Basic Move* 5 [0]

Dodge 8

Social Background

TL 6 [0]

CF Late 19th, early 20th century Europe [0]

Languages: English (Native) [0]; Latin (Accented) [4]; Ancient Greek (Accented) [4]; French (Accented) [4]

Advantages*

Reputation (Leading expert on rare books) +4, all book collectors, always recognized [10]

Status 2 [10]

Charisma 1 [10]

Wealth (Comfortable) [10]

Independent Income (Wealthy) [2]

Contact Group (Book collectors and publishers; 9 or less; effective skill 15; usually reliable) [20]

*After 1922, add another rank of Status [5]

After 1926, add a fourth rank of Status [5]

Disadvantages

Obsession (To amass the greatest book collection in the world) [-10]

Overconfident [-5]

Bad Sight (Corrected) [-10]

Secret (Much of his life's work is a sham) [-10]

Quirks

Hates being called Tom, Tommy, or T.J. (-1 reaction) [-1]

Spends all disposable income on books [-1]

Enjoys revealing forgers, even at personal and professional risk [-1]

Skills

Accounting 14 (IQ+1) [8]

Area Knowledge (London) 13 (IQ+0) [1]

Artist (Printing)* 15 (IQ+2) [2]

Connoisseur (Literature)† 16 (IQ+3) [8]

Diplomacy 12 (IQ-1) [2]

Expert Skill (Printing) 13 (IQ+0) [4]

Finance 13 (IQ+0) [4]

Literature 16 (IQ+3) [16]
Merchant 14 (IQ+1) [2]
Propaganda 13 (IQ+0) [2]
Research 13 (IQ+0) [2]
Savoir-Faire (High Society) 13 (IQ+0) [1]
Writing 13 (IQ+0) [2]

* It may seem strange that Wise does not have the Forgery skill. However, he wasn't technically a forger since the works he created were not attempting to duplicate something already in existence. Instead, he created entirely new works but backdated them and included false publishing imprints to give the impression that these works were genuine first editions. Because of this, Artist (Printing) seems to be a better fit for his actual skill.

† Secondary skill based on Literature.

For a modern campaign, add Computer Use 14 (IQ+1) [2]; Teaching 14 (IQ+0) [2]. Wise would most likely be a college librarian or literature professor. He would also be much more careful in producing his spurious works, using antique inks and paper.

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The Omniscient Eye

The Gameable Archaeologist

by Matt Riggsby

This installment came about amid a consultation with the Omniscient Eye: How do real-world professions differ from how those professions are depicted in popular media? This installment, then, is not answering any specific question, but rather dispelling myths and giving general information about a specific profession.

If there is demand, there may be future installments in "The Gameable _____" series. Make your thoughts known by visiting our [Discussion Boards](#) or sending a letter to [The Editor](#).

"Seventy percent of all archaeology is done in the library."
--Dr. Henry Jones Jr.

Few professions have gathered such romantic notions about them as archaeology. The word conjures up visions of well-groomed, linen-clad Brits in an Agatha Christie novel overseeing vast digs in Mesopotamia but looking and acting as if they were still at home in Surrey or Harrison Ford shoving his way past ranks of mummies in search of buried treasure. Oddly enough, those notions did once have some basis in fact. Modern archaeology is a long way away from the rough and tumble avocation of previous centuries, but possibility for adventure remains.

A Brief History Of Archaeology

Archaeology as we know it is an invention of the modern age. Romans sometimes collected Etruscan bronzes and people of the Renaissance collected Classical antiquities, but the idea of someone who studies the past by the examination of old objects has only developed over the past few centuries. The ancestors of archaeologists began to appear during the Renaissance in the form of antiquarians, wealthy and academically inclined hobbyists who collected or surveyed historical curiosities. Naturally, they began to examine them closely and categorize them. These antiquarians also began to suggest that "elfshot" and "thunderstones," symmetrically-shaped bits of stone sometimes found in the dirt, were, in fact, axes and arrowheads used by technologically primitive ancestors, similar to the stone tools used in the New World. And they collected theories on ancient constructions such as Stonehenge and other (at the time) unexplained stone monuments of Europe.

Archaeology got its biggest boost in the 19th century as European power stretched into Egypt and Mesopotamia. This was a vitally important time for both the popular image and the academic importance of archaeology. For the former, Egyptian motifs and artifacts became all the rage. Europeans wanted to see more and know more about the exotic east, and both footloose adventurers and wealthy tourists tried their hand at digging up something to impress (or sell to) the folks back home. For the latter, the opening of these areas meant that entire new civilizations, not just dirty savages, were directly available for study, but only through their material culture. And they weren't just any civilizations. These were the lands of the Bible. The

What is an Archaeologist?

Some people use the term "archaeologist" to mean anyone who digs up old things. Here, we'll concentrate on the modern, academic sense of the term: someone who studies past humans and societies through material remains. It does not include paleontologists, who study extinct animals, although their professional lives are probably much the same. Think of them as anthropologists of the dead rather than zoologists of the dead.

decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics and the discovery of cuneiform texts in Mesopotamia opened up the possibility of finding texts which would provide a greater understanding of the historical events that formed Judaism and Christianity.

These were the years of archaeology's greatest adventures and, alas, greatest wastes. The techniques of the period, if they can be called that, mostly involved digging with pick and shovel until something pretty turned up. Such efforts might involve a single native looking for something to sell the tourists or hundreds of laborers methodically tearing apart a city under the direction of a determined European treasure hunter. This style of excavation would horrify the modern archaeologist, who pays attention to countless dull details which, when viewed in the context of their deposit and their relationships with one another, can provide vast quantities of information but become useless when carelessly tossed about. In Egypt, mummies were even burned on campfires as a substitute for wood.

Competition for artifacts was fierce in these relatively lawless areas, and archaeological expeditions in the same area might try to sabotage one another. At least once, a group of diggers on one side of a hill, hearing that their competitors on the other side might have found a promising tomb, dug a tunnel *through* the hill to plunder it before their slower competitors could get to it.

Things calmed down over the course of the century, though, as the rage for artifacts abated somewhat and the richest sources of plunder dried up. New generations of scholars began proposing more methodical, scientific ways of approaching archaeological sites, culminating in the works of such antiquarians as Charles Darwin's friend Lieutenant-General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers (a great steampunk name if ever there was one), who proposed that archaeological evidence should be collected in such a way that it would be admissible in a court of law.

Treasure hunting in the 19th century mode still exists, but most nations have come to recognize the cultural and historical value of ancient artifacts and have moved to clamp down on such activities. Instead, archaeological sites have come to be treated more like endangered species: they are limited in number, and there won't be any more forthcoming (the Romans, for example, aren't going to build any more cities), so they had best be husbanded carefully. Taken together, these developments have led at last to the development of the modern, scientific archaeologist.

Modern Archaeology

Modern archaeologists might be divided into three overlapping categories: academic, government, and contract. Academic archaeologists are what most people think of as archaeologists: university professors who mix digging with teaching and dealing with the other requirements of holding down an academic position. Government archaeologists work for departments overseeing antiquities and cultural heritage. They may regulate the activities of other archaeologists, work with endangered sites on public land, or survey building areas for potential damage to archaeological sites. Contract archaeologists work for private firms, doing archaeological work for hire. They might do archaeological surveys as part of ecological impact studies (legal requirements for such surveys are the reason the biggest employer of archaeologists in the state of California is Caltrans, the agency responsible for building highways), subcontract for academic and government projects, perform salvage operations, consult with private historical preservation organizations and law enforcement, and other such work.

But one thing the fictional Dr. Jones got right is that most of an archaeologist's time is spent in the library . . . or the office, or the lab, or the classroom. Archaeologists spend most of their time reading up on topics relevant to their research, preparing and delivering lectures, reviewing papers by their peers (and, for academics, grading student assignments), writing their own papers and grant proposals, doing paperwork, attending professional conferences, cleaning and sorting artifacts, and trying to make sense of a huge mass of tiny details.

They'll eventually go into the field, but before they do, countless arrangements have to be made. Work must be planned, accommodations must be found, equipment and supplies must be prepared, and vehicles must be arranged for. Academic and contract archaeologists often have to get permission to work in their chosen areas from bureaucrats, land owners, or both. Government archaeologists *are* the permission-granting bureaucrats, so it isn't as much of an issue for them. Many countries limit the amount of work that can be done (leading foreigners in particularly archaeologically rich nations to form governing institutions to mediate between the government and scholars and to

efficiently direct their own country's efforts there) and require that foreign archaeologists work in concert with natives.

But eventually, an archaeologist comes to what got him into archaeology to begin with: fieldwork. Some fieldwork is a lonely affair, with the archaeologist spending days alone or with a colleague or two surveying and doing a little digging. However, it will often involve several senior archaeologists along with a mixture of junior archaeologists, students, paid laborers and other colleagues (for example, geologists with an interest in the same region) working out of a home base for weeks or months at a time. Individuals come and go, but it's not uncommon to find five to twenty people (or more) involved at any given time. The character of the base depends on where the work is being done. Archaeologists working near civilization (say, excavating the Athenian Agora) will take advantage of it as much as possible, staying in apartments and negotiating the use of lab space in nearby museums and universities. In the countryside, they may rent a few cottages; in truly remote areas, it's tents for everyone with occasional trips into the nearest town for supplies.

Fieldwork can be divided into survey and excavation. Survey involves walking around with eyes to the ground looking for artifacts and other signs of human habitation. Survey is used to get an overall idea of the nature and distribution of archaeological evidence in the region. In recent years, archaeologists have been able to use satellite images, aerial photography (kites and balloons can lift cameras as a low-cost alternative to manned aircraft), ground-penetrating radar, and other high-tech devices to aid the process. High-altitude images reveal outlines of buildings and even ancient field plowing patterns not visible from the ground, while other remote sensing techniques can find sub-surface disturbances that might point to interesting sites. Resolution isn't very high with any of these techniques, though; they tend to say "this spot may have been a building at one point, or maybe a garbage pit . . . or perhaps a small pond" rather than "the face on that gold coin has an unusually big nose."

Excavation is what most people think of as archaeology. Once decisions are made about where to dig, trenches, usually one to three meters on each side, are marked off with string and digging begins. Picks and shovels may be used to take off surface layers if there's no reason to expect that they'll contain anything interesting. Once interesting levels are reached, excavation moves to smaller tools, systematically removing a few centimeters of soil at a time. The archaeologist's favorite weapon at this stage is a four- to six-inch pointing trowel (a curved gardening trowel will be laughed at), with the edges sharpened to scrape down walls. Very fine tools such as brushes and dental tools might be used on exceptionally delicate surfaces (for example, crumbling mosaics), but circumstances rarely call for them.

As the trench is excavated, soil samples may be reserved for chemical analysis, and at least some of the dirt is screened. The soil is poured into a frame with a coarse wire mesh bottom (1/4-inch holes is common), and the frame is shaken to sift the dirt from artifacts. Many small artifacts, such as coins and tiny projectile points, which might be overlooked by diggers, are found by screening.

However they're found, artifacts are bagged, labeled with the location where they were found, and taken to a field lab. There, they're cleaned a bit more, cataloged, and perhaps photographed or examined under a microscope. Most serious analysis, however, takes place outside of the field season. Fieldwork, which takes people and equipment far from home, is expensive, so effort is concentrated on those tasks that can only be performed in the field. Analysis, which can require specialized equipment or just time, is left for a well-equipped lab. And that takes us back to the library until the next field season.

Building An Archaeologist

The period up to the 20th century was the period of aristocrats and adventurers. In the early years, an archaeologist needed little more than an interest in the past and enough money to take him where he wanted to go, and the two-fisted adventurer of pulp fiction isn't necessarily a bad model to work from. For example, one such adventurer was Giovanni Belzoni, who traveled to Egypt in search of valuables for the British Museum. Belzoni had little formal education and none at all in any historical field. Rather, he had some talent as an engineer, which aided him in large-

Potsherds

A sherd (*not* shard) is a broken piece of pottery, and archaeologists go on endlessly about them. Pottery is extremely chemically stable and subtle variations in the composition and decoration can tell a great deal about who made it, when, how, and sometimes for what purpose. As a result, it's surprisingly valuable in terms of how much information it can provide.

scale excavation, and a background as a circus strongman.

Modern archaeologists need better qualifications. All archaeologists need in-depth knowledge of the history and material culture of the people they study. Depending on the academic traditions from which they come, they may come with a general grounding in anthropology (most likely in America), geology (more common in Europe), or a particular body of history and literature (for example, Greek and Roman Classics). Most archaeologists will have additional background in one or more academic or technical specialties: pottery, stone tools, botany, geology, economics, zoology, metallurgy, religion, and so on.

A few specializations require particularly interesting skills. One is underwater archaeology. With the development of scuba gear, it has become possible to investigate ancient shipwrecks, well-preserved because of favorable sea-bottom conditions. It's expensive, requires strong diving skills, and archaeologists can only work for short periods at a time, but it's a relatively glamorous specialization.

Another is experimental archaeology, which attempts to reproduce ancient techniques for producing tools and performing other tasks. An archaeologist is unlikely to be an all-around survival expert, but he may have surprising insight into how to butcher an animal or turn a lump of glass into a wickedly sharp blade.

Archaeologists typically need some facility with languages. No matter where they work, they need to speak the local language well enough to get by and a reading knowledge of any appropriate language with literature that touches on their subject area. For example, archaeologists studying European prehistory need at least English, French, and German (there's a lot of relevant literature in all three languages), and those studying historical periods will probably know some Latin and possibly Greek as well. However, they need not be linguistic experts. Polyglots like *Stargate's* Daniel Jackson display cinematic abilities.

One less obvious thing an archaeologist needs is at least a minimal level of social and administrative skills. They must navigate bureaucracies to obtain grants, arrange field accommodations, and schmooze with officials and landowners to get permission to work and keep the good will of local communities. Some people, including many native Americans and Australians, have been ill-used in the past and are resentful of outsiders coming in and disturbing the remains of *their* past, so a certain amount of diplomacy often is called for.

Finally, there are matters of attitude and professionalism. One thing that Dr. Jones had a near-miss on is that artifacts "belong in a museum." The stance of the archaeologist is that that's true as far as it goes, in that archaeological artifacts, being part of the common cultural heritage of humanity, generally belong where they can benefit everyone, not in private hands. However, the point of archaeology is not to find pretty things to show off in museums. It's to learn about the past. From that point of view, a box full of pottery fragments, properly collected and analyzed, is more valuable than a single flawless vase. This is not to say that archaeologists don't dream of finding the next Rosetta stone or King Tut's tomb, but they also dream of fighting Nazis and Frenchmen in white suits, but that's just not going to happen, so let's be realistic, shall we?

Consequently, while archaeologists have a proprietary attitude towards their sites, they don't actually keep the artifacts. Ownership of excavated artifacts is a sensitive issue. Many nations regard archaeological artifacts as part of their cultural heritage, not something to be sold off or privately held. Therefore, artifacts of any value will be kept in laboratories where they can be readily analyzed or museums where they can be displayed to an interested public, and definitely *not* in an archaeologist's home. Some, admittedly, might surreptitiously keep a vaguely interesting sherd or similar small item as a souvenir, but gold medallions and elaborate burial masks are too important and too conspicuous to keep to oneself. Archaeologists are also generally very much against other people's private ownership of ancient artifacts. Participating in traffic in antiquities is widely regarded as unethical, and while legally sanctioned treasure hunters do exist (for example, salvage companies that locate shipwrecks in international waters and sell the finds), most archaeologists regard them with contempt, much as animal-rights activists might regard trophy hunters.

Archaeologists generally *don't* need combat-oriented abilities. Significant physical disability will keep someone out of the field, but archaeologists are generally in no better or worse shape than any other white-collar professional.

**The Great Lost [Fill In
The Blank]!**

On the other hand, many archaeologists return from the field in better shape than when they left (a few months of digging holes will do that), and in environments where dangerous animals are a hazard (say, rural Alaska or parts of South and Central America), it's occasionally useful to have someone who can tell one end of a gun from another.

Archaeological Adventure

So what kinds of adventures might archaeologists get into? Well, what could happen to someone who travels to exotic lands, deals with items which might be valuable and could have special significance to the natives, and has a variety of interesting, if largely academic, skills? Here are some possibilities:

Cloak, Dagger, and Trowel: During WWII, the OSS recruited agents from a variety of unusual professions. Among them were archaeologists, some of whom were parachuted into the Greek islands to help the resistance. Though the idea of an Oxford don leaping from a plane to fight Jerry may seem absurd, the archaeologists spoke the local languages, knew the lay of the land, and had local contacts, all important attributes for an intelligence operative.

Even now, archaeology could be a cover for a secret agent. After the first Iraq war, a humanitarian mission sponsored by Doctors Without Borders managed to bring an archaeologist along with them to inspect some important sites. It might have been tempting to a government to recruit a legitimate archaeologist to snoop around some behind the lines.

But even a legitimate archaeologist might find himself forced to make like an action movie spy. Permission for foreign scholars is one of those little political footballs that can be tossed around by feuding governments, and in uncertain times or under radical regime changes, today's welcome guest could be tomorrow's imperialist crook. Just as some Westerners had a few hours warning to flee [Thailand](#) before the country's involvement in the world wars, an archaeologist in an unstable country could find himself trying to get out of a foreign land before the new regime's policies sweep him into a local prison.

Fighting the Pothunters: A "pothunter" is someone who digs up sites in search of salable artifacts, a crime in many countries. Because spectacular artifacts can fetch high prices in the international market, insurgents who fund themselves with drug smuggling dabble in pothunting as well. In Peru and Chile, some large archaeological sites resemble a cross between conventional digs and small military bases, with barbed wire perimeters and machine-gun nests. Even solitary pothunters may carry guns to fight off police.

It's entirely plausible for an archaeologist, particularly a government archaeologist, to get involved in a crime drama. He'll be a consultant rather than an actual cop, but he can be an important part of an investigation of pothunting, antiquities smuggling, forgery (which is rampant; easily half of antiquities on the market today could be fakes), and similar crimes. In less stable regions, he may be subject to assassination attempts or present at an archaeological site when a criminal gang attacks.

Curse of the Mummy!: And, yes, if anyone's going to get hit by an ancient curse or attacked by long-imprisoned Things Man Was Not Meant To Know, odds are it'll happen to an archaeologist. Most important Egyptian tombs have

Fictional archaeologists embark on quests to find specific grand lost artifacts or the *one* piece of evidence that will irrefutably prove their pet theory. The goals of real archaeologists are notably less grand.

Just as in physical sciences a single experimental result is unlikely to immediately revolutionize our understanding of the universe and rewrite existing physical law, a single artifact or even a single site is unlikely to overthrow decades or centuries of prior scholarship. For example, the appearance of Roman coins in the New World would not enable someone to prove that the empire extended across the Atlantic and as far as Mississippi, since it overlooks a total lack of other kinds of evidence, such as textual references and remains of cities. (This is a real example, by the way. Some European colonists in the early years of American settlement brought historical curios with them, including Roman coins. It was occasionally customary to drop souvenirs into the foundations of a new home for good luck, leading to the deposition of Roman coins in New England soil. Enthusiastic amateurs of later centuries, unaware of this practice, stumbled over said coins and jumped to the wrong conclusion.) This is not to say that revolutions in historical thought are impossible. It does, however, mean a lot of tedious ground-laying by a great many scholars, not finding one perfect piece of evidence.

Likewise, quests for legendary places and artifacts are popular

been opened, but there are still potentially rich finds elsewhere (South and Central America, Africa, China, and the areas surrounding Mesopotamia are good candidates).

One problem with purported ancient curses is that they tend to be subtle, making it unlikely that anyone will believe in them. The deaths associated with the excavators of Tut's tomb were normal-looking enough to look creepy only when looked at very selectively, but spectacular deaths are a possibility as well: Dennis Puleston, a prominent Mesoamerican archaeologist, died when he was struck by lightning when a storm suddenly came up while he was standing atop the El Capitan pyramid in the Maya city of Tikal.

The same archaeologists who incur curses or release Things are also likely to be familiar with the texts containing defenses against them. However, it's likely that those defenses will be tied up in the same disputes that always fill academic publications. Given a few possible rituals and incantations, archeologists, like any historically inclined specialists, are likely to argue over proper translations, find gaps in the texts ("Say, what are you supposed to do with the ox blood?"), uncover ambiguities ("Does that phrase mean virgin's blood or shitake mushrooms?"), and worry about dating ("That was written in the fifth century; are you sure it'll banish a 12th-century demon?").

in fiction but hold little attraction in real life. This is less because they're well-hidden and more because, when the evidence is examined closely, little is reliable. Even if we ignore the very real possibility that a given artifact may already have been found or a site thoroughly destroyed and built over, historical sources are vague and usually contradictory, often to the point of uselessness. If one did find, say, the True Cross or the Ark of the Covenant, it would be nigh-impossible to prove its authenticity using the sources we have. Searches for lost historical sites can generate considerable popular interest and, consequently, funding (excavations at Cadbury castle in England, thought by some to be the site of Camelot, received considerable attention because of the Arthurian angle despite the fact that there was little or no actual evidence that the historical Arthur had ever been there or even that he had ever had a court of his own), but at some point those interests will get balanced with more skeptical viewpoints. That goes double for artifacts, which can easily be moved or destroyed (one might, for example, have some hope of finding the site of da Vinci's workshop, but none of finding his paintbrushes). Consequently, while an archaeologist might privately dream of turning up a long-lost place or thing, those concerns will usually be submerged, at least during working hours, by general interest in a region or period of time.

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of

Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore to all. Or, at least, to all with valid *Pyramid* subscriptions.

The Omniscient Eye seeks to answer questions that are tied to knowledge of the real world, providing information with a perspective that is of use to gamers. The Omniscient Eye does not concern itself with specific game systems or statistics.

Do you have a question for the Omniscient Eye? Feel free to send it to pyramidquestions@yahoogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Pyramid Review

Mr. Johnson's Little Black Book (for Shadowrun)

Published by [FanPro LLC](#)

Written by Robyn King-Nitschke, Steve Ratkovich, Costán Sequeiros, & Malik Toms with Rob Boyle & Elissa Carey

Cover by Adi Granov

Illustrated by Dave Allsop, Steve Bagatzky, Shane Coppage, Steve Ellis, Larry MacDougal, Marc Sasso, & Klaus Scherwinski

124-page black & white perfect bound softback; \$24.99

The latest release for *Shadowrun* focuses in on the metier at the heart of the game: the "run through the shadows," or *shadowrun*. Not only does it discuss this, but *Mr. Johnson's Little Black Book* also fills in gaps left by two out-of-print titles from the Second and First Editions of *Shadowrun*. From the First Edition, this is *Sprawl Sites*, which gave the GM a collection of archetypal locations, each mapped, plus a set of encounter charts, and another of contact and archetype listings. From the Second Edition, the supplement is the *Contacts* booklet included in the *Gamemaster's Screen*. This new supplement builds on the contents of the previous pair with all-new material set in the Sixth World of 2064, and as per usual ties in with several other *Shadowrun* supplements. Primarily these are the *Shadowrun Companion* and the [Sprawl Survival Guide](#) but also include *Matrix* and *Rigger 3*.

Mr. Johnson's Little Black Book is not a supplement that expands upon the actual background and setting of the Sixth World, so it forgoes the usual factual presentation interspersed with heavy doses of commentary and conjecture from the denizens of the Shadowlands BBS. This is a rules and discussion book, though still presented to the usual standards. The writing is both clear and well-edited, all punctuated by pleasing artwork. As ever, Larry MacDougal's illustrations stand out, but so do those of Shane Coppage and Dave Allsop.

It opens with "Anatomy of a Shadowrun," an essay that dissects in turn the Set-Up, Meeting Mr. Johnson, the Legwork, the Run, and the Aftermath aspects of the atypical shadowrun. Set-Up looks at the nature of the campaign itself, expanding upon the material and advice given in the *Shadowrun Companion*. Its focus is the party and the roles played by the various archetypes as well as suggesting how to get them together. Essentially, this is the standard take upon the subject, though it has to take into consideration the role played by both magic and the matrix in the game. The chapter gets a little more interesting when discussing potential employers, dividing the Mr. Johnson figure into three types: the Private, the Corporate, and the Street Johnson. The approach and needs of the three types is very different when it comes to hiring runners. For example, the requirements of the Private Johnson are more personal than professional, and probably concern a single issue, while those of a Street Johnson, while still personally motivated, are likely to be tied to a civilian organization, invariably of an illegal, political, or underground nature.

Legwork takes the runners through the preparation needed for the job, from research and surveillance to checking with contacts and assembling any necessary equipment, while the Run suggests how the GM should referee the Job itself. Finally, the Aftermath covers closing the deal with the Mr. Johnson, any remaining loose ends, and what the characters might be doing in their downtime. It includes suggestions for the GM on how to handle Riggers (vehicle and remote operators) and Deckers (net runners), both archetypes that involve dice intensive mechanics. This can be as NPCs, or make use of the quick resolution systems found in the back of the book. The chapter is supported and illustrated by a

decent piece of color fiction, which could have been improved if it had been paralleled with an explanation of the game mechanics involved in each scene. This would help to enhance the advice of this first chapter, which though both solid and useful, is perhaps a little obvious to most experienced GMs.

The second chapter is all about "It's Who You Know," and is probably the one that a GM will make the most use of. Some 50 contacts are detailed, across society's entire stratum. They are neatly organized into categories: security, entertainment and journalism, political, corporate, on-the-street, criminal, in-the-shadows, magical, law enforcement, and working stiff. The first three entries under each category receiving an expanded treatment and represent variants upon a major contact type. Thus for the Security Guard, there is the Corporate Security, the Rent-a-Cop, and the Parasecurity expert, the latter handling paranimals to help guard various facilities. Unlike the others, these three also have their own pieces of color fiction and a slightly expanded background, but all of the contacts have an explanation of their role in the game. All have a hook to get them involved in the game, but they do read as a little too simple. Fully written up with detailed statistics, the 50 contacts come ready-to-run and are a very useful resource for the GM.

Locations receive a similar treatment in "Where It's At," describing some 45 sprawl sites across 19 different categories that the runners might visit. They include corporate offices, housing and apartments, shops, laboratories, bars and nightclubs, warehouses, and municipal facilities. They are actual places, generic in so far that they can be situated anywhere the GM desires. Where they fail to be quite as useful as those found in ***Sprawl Sites*** is in the lack of maps, but this would require a whole other book. One useful tool is the set of "Neighborhood Generation Tables," which with the roll of a few dice enable the GM to create a city block or street and its buildings, all in a few minutes.

"On the Run" gives the GM 12 short scenarios that need relatively little preparation. They range from hijacking an on-the-move drone truck to obtain a particular package without alerting anyone and rescuing a basket ball player who has been beaten up and dumped in a bad neighborhood after refusing to throw a game to cover gambling debts, to smearing a political opponent and searching the sewers to capture an escaped and illegally crossbred paracritter. The scenarios are all small-scale affairs, designed to suit most campaigns. They backed up with two further sets of tables, the first of random encounters, the second being more useful and enabling a GM to create "Runs on the Fly." Again designed for use with both this book and the ***Shadowrun Companion***, this is a nice little aide.

As with other ***Shadowrun*** supplements, the last section of ***Mr. Johnson's Little Black Book*** is devoted to game information. Here it discusses the possibilities present in both high and low-level campaigns, the latter set on the streets, the former more like a James Bond-style game. Also included are the rules and guidelines necessary to create characters for either type of game. More immediately applicable are the rules for a character's reputation -- his street cred, notoriety, and the public awareness of the character. Finally, the book is rounded out with rules for handling both Matrix runs and vehicular combat. For Matrix runs, two methods are suggested, one simplifying the rolls necessary to a situation-by-situation basis, the other requiring just the single roll. The player spends successes resulting from this single roll to achieve the objectives of the run. The quick rules for vehicular combat just handle vehicle-to-vehicle combat and work easily for get-aways and the like.

Mr. Johnson's Little Black Book is really a corollary to the ***Shadowrun Companion***, but it still manages to work as a stand-alone book. It contains a fair amount of useful information -- the contacts in particular, though the "Anatomy of a Shadowrun" is a solid essay on the subject and the locations will find their way into a game despite the lack of maps. The rest is decent enough, but only of limited or short-term use, the adventures and encounter tables in particular. Overall, this supplement does not have any negatives, so the positives outweigh its so-so aspects, the result being that ***Mr. Johnson's Little Black Book*** provides solid, but not spectacular support for the gaming side of ***Shadowrun***.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Cargo

Published by [Wingnut Games](#)

Designed by Tom Jolly, Aldo Ghiozzi, & Allan Sugarbaker

Art by the Fraim Brothers

Rules sheet, four-piece full-color jig-cut board, 80 full-color counters; \$19.95

Tom Jolly has a pretty good reputation in the gaming industry, making some fairly low-key but nevertheless entertaining and insightfully creative products. Now he's joined with Wingnut Games to produce ***Cargo***.

The object of the game is to score the most points by the time someone loads or loses his last crate.

You're all rebels taking part in the Boston Tea Party, the seminal moment in history for tax evaders. As a member of the raiding party that went to the docks to dump tea into the harbor, you're expected to ditch as much oolong as you can. Since life is never simple in a board game, you've actually been hired by one company to *load* their tea, so you've got a vested financial interest in seeing your employer's consignment safely onto the ship while dumping everyone else's goods. Your opponents, in turn, do the same for their company.

The action takes place on a board eight spaces squared (like a chess board), with the waiting boats on all four edges. The crates are randomly placed face-down so no one knows whose tea is concentrated where. You then place your units where you think they'll do the most good, and all the counters are flipped up so the commotion can begin. The only way to get tea anywhere is to push or pull the boxes around. Everyone has the same selection of workers and beasts of burden.

You have dockhands, a burly worker, a mule, and an elephant. Each unit has its own statistics as to what it can do. The dockhands can only push one crate one space, for example, unless several hands get together to push multiple crates in a row. Dockhands are kind of wimpy, though, and can get squished between sliding crates. Elephants can't be pushed, but they can push a lot more than most units. They cannot pull, though; that's where mules come in (sometimes you want to be in front of your load instead of behind it). Using your workers in different combinations (you can put three of them to work in one turn), you shove your crates onto your ship's loading spaces . . . or an opponent's stuff off the end of the pier. Crates are lost to the sea, while squished or dunked workers are eventually replaced on the board. When any one player loses his last crate, the game ends and points are tallied.

You get points for getting your tea onto the ship, pushing your enemies' crates into Boston Harbor, and sending opposing workers into the drink (you lose points if you drop your own people or tea into the water). You can't actually push the workers directly, though -- you can only move the crates, so getting someone into the water means getting a box of tea in between you and them.

The board is beautiful, with bright, clear colors and a nice, utile layout. The pieces have cartoonish but enjoyable artwork, and they fit nicely onto the board. It comes in jig-cut segments, and since the game asks you to slide your units about, unlevel cuts can get in the way of this. (The board's troublesome incisions may also vary from one copy of the product to another.) Like many counter sheets, not every square here has art on it, so the game makes good use of those as score counters. Alas, there aren't quite enough blanks to keep up with all the points you'll score in an average game for dunking opponents.

Cargo is unfortunately equal parts good and bad. The movement rules make it a good exercise in thought, giving players something to pore over as they look for the advantage. Two to four people can play, if the two-player limit on chess doesn't move you. Unfortunately, the different movement styles and rules for different pieces are still open to debate, even though one whole side of the rules sheet is given over to graphic examples of several combinations. Even if movement makes perfect sense to you, it's not all that elegant. Although each piece has its movement stats printed on it (and one player is going to have a devil of a time trying to read the white writing used on his yellow background), the rules for each piece just don't become second nature.

Cargo is another clever idea from the wizard of **WizWar**, but when playing a game of strategy, the participants should not be spending equal time on scanning the board for an advantage and reading the rules for clarification.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

Russian Rails

Published by [Mayfair Games](#)

Created by Jodi Soares

Boxed set; \$38.00

Russian Rails is the latest in Mayfair Games' highly successful ***Empire Builder*** line of games, joining previous efforts such as ***Empire Builder***, ***British Rails***, ***EuroRails***, ***Nippon Rails***, ***India Rails***, ***Australia Rails***, ***Iron Dragon***, and ***Lunar Rails***.

For those unfamiliar with the line, the ***Empire Builder*** series is one of the mainstays of train-based board games. Each product uses the same set of rules, with (usually) very minor variations. Each game is played on a plastic-coated map of a given locale that is overlaid with a pattern of dots and symbols to represent special terrain features, such as mountains. The object of the game is twofold: to create an extensive network of rail lines, and to be the first player to reach 250 million "dollars." To do this, players are given a fixed sum of money at the beginning of the game with which to lay initial track, represented by erasable crayon marks drawn by each player on the map, and then are given a series of three cards that describe various cities that need commodities, and how much payment one will receive for completing the loads. Players then have to balance going to particular supply cities to pick up the various commodities, and then freighting them to demand cities, funneling the profits from the run back into further rail construction. Upgrading of trains to faster or more spacious machines is also possible. As the game progresses, smaller amounts of money need to be reinvested in rail building, and it becomes easier to generate a profit. There are occasional disaster cards buried amongst the load cards that slow down play, wipe out tracks, and so on.

In a nutshell, these are the rules, and as the number of ***Empire Builder*** games out there attests, they provide for a game that can be quite addictive.

So what sets ***Russian Rails*** apart from its predecessors?

There are two kinds of ***Empire Builder*** games. The first type is simply territorial: they offer almost no change to the mechanics, and merely change the game location. A change of scenery can make for a very different game (or a useful geography lesson -- the games are often touted as educational on this basis), and most of the ***Empire Builder*** series are like this: the same game, in different locales. There are, however, attempts to change the game by changing nature of the rules. This has been done in a minor way in ***Luna Rails***, where the action takes place on the three-dimensional sphere of the moon, and in a major way in ***Iron Dragon***, which modifies the mechanics and the setting considerably for a fantasy world.

Russian Rails straddles the two types of rail game, in that instead of changing the locale or rules, it adds a different element: history. The game is specifically set in the Soviet Union in 1945 at the end of the "Great Patriotic War," and the object is to rebuild the Soviet rail lines after the devastation of the war. The map is the majority of the old Soviet Union, and the game plays initially as does any other ***Empire Builder*** game (as long as one is willing to overlook the spectacle of rail commissars in a communist nation acting like greedy wheeling-and-dealing capitalist rail barons, that is!). However, built into the game is the understanding that communism is a flawed system headed for the ashcan of history, and that at some point, communism will fall. This can be simulated in a number of ways, though it is usually done by having one event card read "Communism Falls!" (the rules provide for other player-agreed conventions to have that same event come about). Once this card is drawn and communism falls, the game changes considerably: the Soviet Union breaks up into the Russian Federation, and what were simply markings on the map board become semi-

independent provinces. The biggest change comes in the form of tariffs: it costs money to move goods into Russia proper, each time one's train crosses the border. Woeful is the player whom circumstances have forced him to build rail lines that cross the border several times -- the tariff costs can add up.

This change adds an interesting element to what would be just another of the ***Empire Builder*** series of games. It also has some other repercussions in the game world. For instance, another new addition to this particular game are a series of events cards that are just delivery cards under other names, such as "Supplies Needed for Sputnik Launch -- The first player to deliver machinery and oil to Baykonur will earn \$25 M." This is a nice little feature to this game, and one which, hopefully, future ***Empire Builder*** games will make use of. However, each of these cards has a different listing for the two phases of the game, and the situations on the post-communism section of the card are very different from those on the communism section. Another little wrinkle is the fact that, for the first time ever, the commodity chips actually have names on them along with the commodity symbols. No more wondering whether that chip is coal or bauxite: they're safely labeled now. This is a help given the fact that symbols from previous games are re-used here for slightly different things ("Is that wine?" "No, it's vodka.").

Russian Rails is thus an interesting entry in the ***Empire Builder*** series of games. It has all the charm of any of the other territorial ***Empire Builder*** games, and will appeal to anyone who has liked any of them. It is also an interesting gift for any avowed slavophile. And, while calling the game an educational tool may be stretching matters a bit, it's a nice thing to play with one's teens and pre-teens to teach them a little bit about Russian geography. For the experienced ***Empire Builder*** series player, the build-in "fall of communism" scenario adds a new wrinkle to an established game, and can provide a bit of variety for the players who liked, say, ***British Rails*** and want something a bit different, but not as different as ***Lunar Rails*** or ***Iron Dragon***. Once more, Mayfair proved that it can breathe new life into an old formula.

--C.J. Beiting

License to License

There's an interesting column over on the comic book information site [Newsarama](#) about the upcoming movie *Tonight He Comes*, which will tell the story of a nihilistic superhero who “develops a newfound purpose in life when he is drawn to a married woman.” This article dovetailed nicely with an article on [CNN.com](#) entitled “Is the original screenplay dead?”

The idea of Newsarama's article is that the big studios might be realizing that it doesn't necessarily need to buy the rights to “second string” comic characters anymore for their movies, because if there's something cool or interesting about them then they can just take the concept and make the movie themselves. After all, the idea of a “vampire hunter who's also a vampire” isn't exactly cutting edge, and doesn't require licensing the character of Blade from Marvel Comics. Likewise “a guy who wears a suit of powered armor” isn't anything particularly new, and studios might realize they don't gain anything for buying the rights to an Iron Man movie that they couldn't get by starting from scratch. The article points to the success of *The Incredibles*, an obvious superhero movie that is indebted to many superheroic teams <koff koff>Fantastic Four<koff koff> yet is fully owned by the studio, which is free to exploit it.

The idea behind CNN's article is that Michael Jackson might be overhauling Social Security to cast off suspicions that he might be Deep Throat . . . er, no, wait; I'm getting a few articles mixed up. The one I'm thinking of talks about how story-based screenplays are having a difficult time finding a place in Hollywood right now:

“ . . . [A]s the Montecito Picture Co.'s Tom Pollock observes, studios aren't interested in 'doing any movies that aren't presold behemoths. It's very hard to presell anything original.' Given the enormous cost of making movies, the majors know what they want: event pictures aimed at the widest possible audience.”

Couple these two together, and what do you have?

A tougher time for gaming companies hoping to license their wares to others for big bucks.

One of the holy grails of the gaming industry is the “intellectual property,” that idea which turns out to be a million-dollar gem when exploited for movies, video games, action figures, Halloween costumes, and the like. Many game writers and artists are reluctant to sell full rights to their works to companies, since they fear the company will “strike it rich” with their creations, leaving the writers bitter, penniless, and eating beans out of a can. While it's certainly feasible this could be the case (especially since there are plenty of examples of this in other fields), it's so rare as to be scarcely a blip on the radar in the gaming industry.

Does this mean it's impossible for a gaming property to be turned into something Big and Valuable? Not at all; obviously, several RPGs have already done so. But lots more haven't made it big, and probably never will. What, then, is necessary for a gaming property to break out? I have a few thoughts.

(Keep in mind that I've neither sold any properties, nor been in a position to buy any. I'm utterly unqualified to speak on this matter . . . which has never stopped me before.)

It needs to have a “hook” of an idea . . . Many gaming universes do well with this: “*Blade Runner* with magic” (*Shadowrun*), “cars with guns” (*Car Wars*), “magical factions warring with technology-lovers” (*Mage*). However, many game universes don't. For example, I've never quite gotten the sense that there was a hook for *Traveller*; the closest I ever found was the *New Era* material, where the *Traveller* universe found itself knocked down a few pegs by a technology-attacking virus. (Of course, *New Era* material is pretty much shunned by many *Traveller* fans, so it's probably not a good source to indicate.) I suspect that the properties that will have the best shot at life outside gaming will have a strong hook – something that can be summed up in a movie poster, or at most a paragraph.

. . . But the idea needs to be more than the hook. However, it's not enough for there to be that strong premise, because if that's all there is, it can usually be lifted to another medium. For example, *Deadlands* has a great hook – the Wild West with magic – but the core premise can be easily taken without needing to license the game. On the other

hand, ***Vampire: The Masquerade*** has an almost tired hook – vampires are real – but makes it work by adding to it: “Almost every legend about vampires is true, from a certain perspective.” I suspect this step is most difficult for those games that were created to capitalize on existing trends or tropes. For example, ***Car Wars*** no doubt owes its existence to many early-80s post-apocalyptic visions of the world where road warrior-ing is commonplace; as a result, most people who might want to use the ***Car Wars*** hook can simply go back to the source material and draw inspiration from there.

The package has to be easier to buy than the hook is to steal. If it's a far-out hook that somehow “works” because of the effort put into the license, then it's probably easier to license it than to try to cull out what you can within legal parameters. For example, I'm not a fan of the base premise of ***Werewolf: The Apocalypse*** (which, for those unfamiliar, is “werewolves are real, but they're genetic spiritual warriors who fight threats to the environment”). However, if I was a studio exec who liked the idea of “werewolves fighting for the environment and traveling to far-out CGI realms,” it's a heck of a lot easier to throw a bunch of money at White Wolf then figure out how to make that premise work without stealing their thunder.

These random thoughts probably aren't too useful to anyone, but maybe they'll inspire someone to make their first jillion selling their homebrew campaign. And if it does, remember that I *do* accept contributions to the Random Thought Table Research Institute . . .

--Steven Marsh

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Icosahedron Adventures

Charmed, I'm Sure

New Rules for Enchanters for the *d20 System*

by Owen K.C. Stephens

With Valentine's Day just past, it seems reasonable to look at one of the most underrated of *d20 System* spellcasters -- the enchanter. Limited to altering opinions, the enchanter often lacks the power to actually overcome foes, especially in dungeon settings. Further, many of the common tricks of the classic mystic seducer from fantasy literature (beguiling foes for days, gathering an army of thralls) are simply out of reach for most enchanters. Other things you might expect an enchanter to be good at, such as negotiation, are totally out of range of his abilities without magic. To make matters worse, the classes most able to take advantage of such Cha-based checks (bards and sorcerers) take a back-seat to wizard-specialist enchanters in terms of raw spellcasting power.

This article presents numerous new tools GMs can use to give enchanters more options and greater breadth, moving them away from "wizards without *fireballs*" to a more useful and differentiated class.

New Spells

Experienced enchanters soon learn that most mind-affecting spells have serious limitations, and set about researching improved versions or alternate spells to overcome these weaknesses. These specialized spells are generally secret, shared only with trusted (or deeply enthralled) allies. While most are enchantments, there are also a number of divination spells enchanters have developed to increase the power of their mind-affecting spells. Even if an enchanter made these spells available to others, the cost would likely be twice the normal rate (starting at sell level $\times 100$ gp, and going up from there).

Bard Spells

2nd-level Bard Spells

Charm Humanoids: As *charm monster*, but only works on humanoids, monstrous humanoids, and giants.

3rd-level Bard Spells

Change Alignment: Cause a target to shift toward a new alignment.

4th-Level Bard Spells

Desire: Cause a target to want a possession or experience.

6th-Level Bard Spells

Viral Charm: As *charm person*, but effect spreads by touch.

Wizard/Sorcerer Spells

2nd-Level Sorcerer/Wizard Spells

Div

Discern Reservations: Divine how target will react to a command or suggestion.

3rd-Level Sorcerer/Wizard Spells

Charm Humanoids: As *charm monster*, but only works on humanoids, monstrous humanoids, and giants.

5th-Level Sorcerer/Wizard Spells

Ench

Change Alignment: Cause a target to shift toward a new alignment.

Desire: Cause a target to want a possession or experience.

7th-Level Sorcerer/Wizard Spells

Ench

Viral Charm: As charm person, but effect spreads by touch.

Eclipse: As dominate person, but mental control may be dropped and reasserted later.

9th-Level Sorcerer/Wizard Spells

Ench

Geas/Quest, Mass: As geas/quest, except targets one creature per caster level, and is negated by a Will save.

Change Alignment

Enchantment (Compulsion)[Mind-Affecting]

Level: Brd 4, Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Short (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One creature

Duration: Special

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

The target of this spell has his alignment shifted one toward an alignment selected by the caster. The law/chaos aspect is shifted first, with the good/evil aspect shifted only if the law/chaos aspect already matches. Multiple successful castings of this spell can move a target multiple steps toward a listed alignment.

Normally, the duration of this spell is only one day per level. If the target's alignment is moved just one step and ends up being exactly the alignment selected by the caster, the spell can become permanent. At the end of the spell's duration, the target must make a second Will save with a +4 bonus. If this save is missed, the spell becomes permanent.

Unless its effects have become permanent, this spell can be instantly negated by *dispel evil*, *remove curse*, or *atonement*.

Charm Humanoid

Enchantment (Compulsion)[Mind-Affecting]

Level: Brd 2, Sor/Wiz 3

This spell works exactly like *charm monster*, except it works on humanoids, monstrous humanoids, and giants.

Desire

Enchantment (Compulsion)[Mind-Affecting]

Level: Brd 4, Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Short (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One creature

Duration: 1 hour/level
Saving Throw: Will negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

The target of this spell is overcome by the need to possess a particular object or fulfill a particular experience, as defined by the caster. The item or experience must be clearly defined in no more than 20 words, and must be theoretically possible for the target to achieve. For example, the spell can make a target wish to own a sword made of silver or to go swimming in a particular river, but not nonsensical desires such as owning a round cube or go swimming in the sun.

The target takes all possible, reasonable actions to fulfill the condition of the desire. The target does not change alignment, however. An evil rogue made to covet the staff of a powerful wizard may be satisfied to steal it, but a paladin would try to purchase the item or find something more desirable to the wizard for trade. Even a good-aligned character accepts damage to their social position or reputation, however, if such consequences are the only way to fulfill the conditions set by the spell.

The caster cannot use desire to cause someone to wish to do or own something clearly harmful or deadly. It is not, for example, possible to cause a target to wish to hold lava, or want to jump off a tall cliff with no way to ensure a safe landing. The target takes all normal and reasonable precautions to minimize unfortunate effects of gaining the item or experience desired. If the spell is used to cause a craving very much out of character for the target, the GM may grant a circumstance bonus to his Will save of up to +4.

Discern Reservations

Divination
Level: Sor/Wiz 2
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Short (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Target: One creature
Duration: 1 minute/level
Saving Throw: Will negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell allows a caster to know how the target would view specific requests or commands. Once a round, the caster can think of an order or suggestion, and learn if the target would be happily willing to obey, grudgingly willing to obey, mildly unwilling to obey, strongly unwilling to obey, or would view the command as clearly harmful or suicidal.

While this spell can be used to save embarrassment when pushing hirelings or allies around, it is most often used by enchanters to determine if the target of a mind-affecting spell will obey a given command.

Eclipse

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-Affecting]
Level: Wiz/Sor 7

This spell works as dominate person, except that the control can be relaxed, causing the target to act in a totally normal and natural fashion. It is impossible to use Sense Motive to realize the target of an eclipse has been enchanted when the control is not being exercised. The caster may establish or drop control as a free action, and may still be aware of the actions of the target without maintaining control. The target of the spell has no memory of any action taken while under mental control, though he has full access to his memories while being controlled.

Geas/Quest, Mass

Enchantment (Compulsion)[Language-Dependent, Mind-Affecting]

Level: Clr 9, Wis/Sor 9

Targets: One or more creatures, no two of which can be more than 30 ft. apart.

Saving Throw: Will negates

This spell functions like geas/quest, except that mass geas/quest affects a number of creatures equal to your level, and each target is allowed a Will save to resist the effects of the spell.

Viral Charm

Enchantment (Charm)[Mind-Affecting]

Level: Brd 6, Sor/Wiz 7

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Range: Unlimited

Target: One or more creatures touched

Duration: 1 day/level

This powerful spell works like charm person, except as noted above and with the following differences. Any creature who fails his save against the viral charm is now a carrier, able to infect other humanoids with the enchantment. Any humanoid who remains in physical contact with a carrier for 10 minutes or more must make a Will save (same DC as the original spell save) or also be charmed and become a carrier. Any target charmed by *viral charm* treats both the original caster and the target that infected him as close friends (as described in *charm person*), though obviously if a charmed target never encounters the original caster, this attitude is irrelevant.

Once a carrier fails to infect a target they are no longer a carrier (though they are still themselves charmed), and any creature who saves against this spell cannot be affected by any other carrier infected by the same casting. At the end of the spells duration all affected targets are free of the spell's effect, regardless of how long they have been affected.

Spontaneous Enchanters

While wizards have the option of specializing in enchantment (using the normal wizard specialization rules) bards and sorcerers don't have a similar mechanic. This is unfortunate because both bards and sorcerers use charisma as their spellcasting ability, which certainly seems to lend itself to an enchantment-based spellcaster. But since both classes only select a very limited number of spells, restricting them to a smaller set of schools is less of a limitation. (A sorcerer barred from taking evocation spells, for example, simply doesn't select any and has just as many total spells available to him as a typical sorcerer.) Additionally, altering the number of spells a bard or sorcerer may know changes the class' total power level so much as to be practically impossible to balance.

As an alternative, bards and sorcerers may be allowed to gain some bonus to one school of magic by taking a penalty to all other schools. Rather than changing spells per day or spells known, allow a spontaneous caster to gain a +3 bonus to caster level in one school in exchange for taking a -2 penalty to caster level (minimum of 0) in all other schools (except universal spells). Thus a 5th-level "specialist" enchanter bard casts all enchantment spells as an 8th-level caster, and all other spells as a 2nd-level caster.

This has no effect on what level of spell the character can cast. A 6th-level enchanter specialist sorcerer is still limited to 3rd-level enchantment spells despite casting those spells as a 9th-level caster (and can cast 3rd-level spells of other schools, even though he casts them as a 4th-level caster). Of course at low levels the caster may be casting many spells as a 0-level caster, making them useless (casting *mage armor* as a 0-level caster results in a duration of 0-hours, meaning the spell ends as soon as it's cast). The caster may still choose to know these spells, but until he can cast them as at least a 1st level caster, they have no effect.

Although this rule is designed specifically to allow spontaneous casters to be enchanters, it can be allowed for other kinds of specialists. Lick wizards, specialized bards and sorcerers are often called by other names. Sample names for

spontaneous casters specialized in the various school of magic are listed below. (It's worth noting that in most cases, bards should not specialize in schools they have little access to, such as evocation or necromancy.)

Specialist Names

School	Bard	Sorcerer
Abjuration	Troubadour	Stalwart
Conjuration	Herald	Famulus
Divination	Sage	Oracle
Enchantment	Courtier	Houri
Evocation	Furioso	Hotspur
Illusion	Mountebank	Magician
Necromancy	Mourner	Gaunt
Transmutation	Esquire	Alchemist

Enchantments

Any enchanter may take one of these special abilities instead of a familiar. An enchantment-specialized spontaneous caster may take one of these special abilities rather than a familiar (if a sorcerer), or instead of one specific bardic ability (if a bard). These special abilities are specifically designed to grow in usefulness as the enchanter gains in level, much as familiars and bardic abilities do.

Entourage

This works exactly like the Leadership feat, except the enchanter may take it at first level. A character may have both an entourage the Leadership feat, giving him two cohorts and a larger number of followers, but taking the entourage ability affects the character's leadership score for purposes of the leadership feat in the same way having a familiar or animal companion does.

Metacharmer

A limited number of times per day, the character may add one level of metamagic feats he knows to an enchantment school spell without preparing the metamagic in advance or increasing the effective level of the spell. (This is often used to allow an enchanter to cast a spell as a Still Spell or Silent spell.)

The number of times per day the enchanter may do this is based on his total number of spellcaster levels, as shown below. At 10th level, the enchanter gains the ability to use two of his daily uses of this ability to add two levels of metamagic feats he knows to an enchantment school spell without preparing the metamagic in advance or increasing the effective level of the spell.

Spellcaster Levels	Uses per day
1-3	1
4-7	2
8-11	3
12-15	4
16-19	5
20+	6

Piquant

The character adds the following skills to his class' list of class skills -- Bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information and Perform. If his class already has one of these skills, he instead gains a +1 bonus to all checks made with that skill.

Additionally, the character gains one skill point per level to that must be spent on one of these skills.

Charismatic Abilities

A GM with access to *d20 Modern* may allow any of the special abilities of the Charismatic hero to be taken as a special ability. Once a character has one of these, he should be allowed to buy others he qualifies for as feats.

Feats

Enchanters often take metamagic feats to augment their spell power, especially Silent Spell, Still Spell, and Heighten Spell. Truly dedicated enchanters turn to more specialized feats to get the most out of their spells. Spell Focus and Greater Spell Focus can increase the save DC of all the caster's enchantment spells. Negotiator and Persuasive improve the chances the enchanter can talk himself past flunkies, to gain access to more valuable targets.

The following feats are specifically designed for specialist enchanters (including courtiers and houri). An enchanter may take one of these feats in place of the bonus feats wizards game every 5 levels.

New Feats

Below are additional feats an enchanter can use to run specific kinds of operations or focus yet more on the power of his spells.

Link Spell is used almost exclusively by enchanters. By combining a beneficial spell (such as mage armor) with a mind-affecting spell (such as charm person), the enchanter can convince a potential target to agree to having a spell cast on him and do so in full sight of the target's allies. Once charmed, the target can easily be convinced to go somewhere with the caster and accept a more powerful mind-affecting spell.

Alluring [General]

Your personal magnetism is considerable.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to all Cha ability checks and untrained checks made with Cha-based skills (though not any other Cha-based skill checks).

Beguiling [General]

Your natural charisma gives you special abilities.

Prerequisites: Char 15+, Alluring, able to cast 2nd level arcane spells **Benefit:** You may select one of the special abilities normally restricted to enchanters (entourage, metacharmer, piquant) at no further cost.

Compelling [General]

You have great skills with compulsion spells.

Prerequisites: Char 15+, Alluring

Benefit: You cast compulsion spells at +1 caster level. This stacks with the bonus granted by such feats as Mesmerizing.

Link Spell [Metamagic]

You can link two spells together, so they act as one.

Prerequisites: Any two other metamagic feats.

Benefit: You can cast two spells together. The two spells must have durations greater than instantaneous and must

target a single creature other than the caster. They act as a single spell when cast. If the target of the linked spells agrees to have a spell cast on him, he forgoes his saving throw against the linked spells.

The linked spells' casting time is two full rounds or the combined casting time of both spells, whichever is longer. They use the shorter range and duration of the two spells. If either spell allows a saving throw, the linked spells are negated by it. If either spell is dispelled, both end. Identifying a linked spell is difficult, and requires a Spellcraft check with a DC of 25 + the level of both spells.

Linked spells take up a spell slot two levels higher than the level of the two spells added together.

Master Enchanter [General]

You are able to use mind-affecting spells with particular adeptness.

Prerequisites: Cha 13+, Alluring

Benefit: A character with this feat gains three specific but minor advantages when using mind-affecting spells, especially charm-type spells.

First, when the character makes a Cha check to exert control over the target of a mind-affecting spell he cast, the character gains a +3 bonus to this roll. This applies to the Cha check made when convincing the target of a spell from the charm person spell chain to take an action it normally wouldn't, as well as to the opposed Cha checks made when two casters both have the same target under mind-affecting spells and give it conflicting orders.

Second, the DC of a Sense Motive check to notice that the target of one of the character's mind-affecting spells is being influenced by an enchantment is increased by 5 (DC 30 for most spells including *charm person*, 20 for *dominate person* or *dominate monster*).

Mesmerizing [General]

Your mind-affecting spells are more potent than those of others.

Prerequisites: Char 15+

Benefit: Your mind-affecting spells have their save DCs increased by +1. This stacks with the bonus granted by taking the Spell Focus feat for the enchantment school and the commanding feat.

Traceless Spell [Metamagic]

The targets of your mind-affecting spells don't realize they've been enchanted.

Prerequisites: Any other metamagic feat.

Benefit: Only mind-affecting spells may be cast as traceless spells. A traceless spell masks itself from its target. If the target of the spell resists it, he has no idea what kind of spell was targeted on him. If he is effected by the spell, he doesn't realize his actions have been mystically influenced even after the duration of the spell ends. The target may wonder why he took actions that were out of character, and may be convinced by friends or allies that he was enchanted, but he has no inkling of that without external input.

Traceless spells use up spell slots two levels higher than their actual level.

Auto-Motives

by Eric Funk

"It's automatic. It's hydromatic. Why, it's Greased Lightning!"

--Grease

As a rule, most western mid-20th- to 21st-century characters have some sort of Driving skill. Those that are or have been in the military may have been trained in the use of a variety of vehicles, including (but not limited to) cars, heavy trucks, and tanks. Espionage and Special Ops recruits would also have familiarity with a variety of vehicles in case they come across them in the field. **GURPS Autoduel** is a good resource for near future campaigns that center around vehicles, but even in other campaigns there can be much more to a car than just writing, "Possession: Ground Vehicle" on a character sheet.

"If nobody comes down here and buys a car in the next hour, I'm gonna club this baby seal."

--Crazy Ernie, *UHF*

Buying a Car

New cars of a desired type may be easier to come by than used cars, and usually come with some kind of warranty. If the players aren't interested in roleplaying it, buying a car may be a Quick Contest of skills between the salesman's Merchant (or Fast-Talk) against the characters' Merchant (or Mechanic) skill. If the GM wishes, it could resolve like a Merchant Influence roll (see p. B204), let the degree of success modify the end price in the favor of the winner by 10% per point! This may not be swindling, *per se*, but the addition or removal of standard/extra options such as supplemental warranties, autographed limited edition collector's fuzzy dice, or Teflon hubcaps. Supermarket sticker prices are usually non-negotiable, but the asking price for a large item such as a car or house is often just the beginning of a long negotiating session.

The "settled" portion of a character's Starting Wealth can pay for the down payment (from 10% to 20% of the full price), and the payments will be added to the character's Cost of Living (see p. B191). Creating a working formula from p. GT:FT 44 for calculating monthly payments and using numbers from a sample [loan web site](#):

Monthly \$ = (1 + (Annual Rate as a Decimal × Number of Years/2)) × Remaining Balance / Total Number of Payments

For example, a \$30,000 car at 6% interest to be paid over 5 years with a 20% down payment will assess monthly payments of $(1 + (0.06 \times 5 / 2)) \times (\$24,000) / 60 = 1.15 \times 400 = \$460$.

Used automobiles, on the other hand, quickly depreciate in value and quality with time, use, and lack of maintenance. A family car that is five years old may have 90% of factory hit points and one less HT, while an older vehicle, left lying out in a field for a decade, may only be able to be restored to 50% of factory hit points and HT-2 after an overhaul due to permanent frame damage! In many jurisdictions, once a used car has changed hands, it must pass a road safety test before it can be registered. A HT check of the vehicle is rolled, and the vehicle could require parts totaling 1% of the new price for every point it fails. A Critical Failure means the mechanic thinks it's unsafe to drive out of the garage! This may be a good incentive to build a vehicle as Fine or Very Fine (see p. VE204) to increase its HT score. The maintenance table at the end of this article provides some examples of parts requiring maintenance. Alternately, one can roll for a random part on the [Universal Breakdown Manual](#). In Japan, cars must pass such a test at years three, five, seven, nine, and every year after that. The cost of the test encourages many individuals to buy new cars every four to five years.

Once the car itself has been purchased, the expenses don't stop there. The owner must pay for licensing (up to \$100 for custom/"vanity" plates), insurance (from \$30 to \$500 per month, depending on the car's age, model, and accident

history, as well as the youngest age and worst driving record of all the drivers to be covered under the policy), and fuel (10-100\$ per month, depending on fuel efficiency, hours of driving, and gas prices). The 2002 Mustang on p. VEL 61 consumes about \$6 of fuel per 100 miles.

Ground vehicles in *GURPS* Books

- Car, Family (TL7) -- VE140
- Car, Ford Mustang (TL7) -- VEL61
- Car, Police Cruiser (TL7) -- C75
- Carriage, Steam (TL5+1) -- STM75
- Horse, Iron (TL5+1) -- STM75
- Jeep (TL6) -- VE139
- Jeep, Ford GPW (TL6) -- W106
- Motorcycle (TL7) -- VE140
- Motorcycle, Schwes Krafrad 750cc R12 (TL6) -- W107
- Motorcycle, Suzuki GSX1300R Hayabusa (TL7) -- VEL60
- SUV, Toyota Land Cruiser (TL7) -- VEL61
- Semi-Trailer, Van (TL7) -- VEL62
- Truck, FLD 120 Freightliner (TL7) -- VEL62
- Truck, GMC 2.5-Ton 6x6 Cargo (TL6) -- W107

A loud crash is heard as the empty mech falls down the cliff and explodes. "I guess I'm not getting paid 'till I'm 80."
-- Private Rico, *Roughnecks*

Responsibility

Once the vehicle is paid for, western countries require some kind of registration and insurance before it can legally be driven on public roads. This means that the vehicle will be under the name of a person or a company who will have to answer for any damages and infractions that occur involving it. This means that in order for characters with the Youth Disadvantage to be able to have free access to the vehicle, they may have to take Patron, or perhaps Sense of Duty (to the owner) to "pay" for it. Renewing of licenses does not come up often in roleplaying, since it would usually be about as exciting to play as it is in real life. Many locales set this date in the month of the owner's birth and do not allow a balance either way, so the full amount must be paid every year. Some TL7 (and presumably most TL8+) insurance companies allow direct withdrawal from bank accounts, which means that it may be one less thing to worry about, assuming that the owner has an steady income to pay for it.

"Carburetors, man. That's what life is all about!"
--Juicy Fruits, *Phantom of the Paradise*

Many modern campaigns take place in cities. A distinguishing mark of a TL7-TL9 city is the number of cars that line and fill the streets. Adventures often revolve around conflict, and thus cars can be a part of this conflict, usually as a form of cover, sometimes as a weapon. Standard commercial cars are typically defined in *GURPS* as providing DR5 to passengers (DR2 through windows). Thus as standard broad cover, standard cars provide DR10 to all areas but 15-16 (feet). Since average civilian vehicles have DR5 on most of the body, and DR 2 on the windows, and targets obstructed by an average civilian car are protected by double this value. At the GM's option, the body of the car can soak up even more damage. An off-road 4x4 may not protect 12-16 (legs and feet), except if crouching behind the tires! Then, the person may only have a 25% chance of being protected by DR5 of the wheel, and 75% chance of the DR1 of the tire protecting them. Skip firing (p. CO60) may be a useful technique to hit people in the feet (and possibly legs) under targets. Logically, vehicles provide the best cover if used lengthwise. That way, the protection offered is twice the body DR in addition to the hit points of the vehicle. A lengthwise shield provides cover for fewer people and is harder to see over. A cinematic character should also worry about fuel tanks exploding on a spark.

Cars and Trucks and Things that Go

-- *Title of a children's book*

This table is a quick index of many vehicles classes that can be found in a modern city. Most have PD3 DR5 metal armor and light frames, but the armored sedan and limos have medium frames and PD4 DR40, and the Semi has an extra-heavy frame (see p. VEL 62).

Description	Loaded Mass(tons)	Occupants	Engine Horsepower	Engine kW	Body Hit Points	Motive ST
Motorcycle	1/2-1	1-2	40	30	16	32
Small Car	1	2-5	100	75	100	200
Medium Car	2	2-5	140	104	200	400
Sport Utility	2	5-8	230	172	250	500
Small Van	2	2-8	200	150	200	400
Small Pickup	2	2-3	200	150	200	400
Large Van	3	2-11	250	186	300	600
Pickup Truck	3	2-3	300	224	350	700
Medium Car (Armored)	4	2-5	350	261	200	400
Limousine (Stretched)	3	4-6	250	186	800	1,600
Box Truck	4	2-3	250	186	500	1,000
Bus	18	40-60	200	150	900	1,800
Semi	15-20	2-3	450	336	3,000	6,000

To find out the Strength rating required to flip a vehicle (or right it), multiply its mass in tons by 40 - this gives the ST total needed to turn over the vehicle (See p. VE189). Only half that is needed if one has a running start. Extra Effort helps (see pp. B89 and CI 12 for details)!

An automobile's motive ST score is most likely limited by its hit points; thus a medium car will have an equivalent ST score of about 360. A 300 horsepower (~224kW) diesel engine in a semi tractor may have a ST score of about 6000. That is many times the raw strength of the Blue Demon (see p. SU 118), but in a tug of war the monster could use Extra Effort to move a mass with an effective ST of 6660! Since machines cannot expend Extra Effort, a Quick Contest of Strength between these two would be very close (10 vs. 11) (see p. CI 13 for details on unusual contests of Strength). Instead of pulling, sometimes one seeks to ram a stationary car, perhaps part of a roadblock. To resolve this, see pp. VE156-158.

"I can't understand it. This car hasn't given me a lick of trouble in nearly six hours."

-- Cosmo Brown, *Singin' in the Rain*

Other Parts to Play

Compared to TL6 roadsters, early TL8 cars are much lighter, have more efficient engines, and thus longer ranges on the same tank of gas. Some options -- such as Air Conditioning, Improved Brakes, and Improved Suspension -- are mid-TL7 commercial technology (see pp. VE20-21). Even in late TL7, many vehicles shipped to warm climates (such as southern parts of the United States) did not have heat vents installed!

A typical TL7 (2002) production automobile is described in ***GURPS Vehicles Lite*** as having a maintenance interval of 154 hours. That means that for every 77 days at two hours' operation per day, it requires approximately four hours of mechanical maintenance. According to p. VE146, if a character does not bring it into the shop for a tune-up at this point, the GM should roll against the Mechanic skill of the person who last performed the maintenance, and for every three months* without time in the shop, add an additional -4 penalty to the roll. Each time the interval elapses another check is made, with the ever-increasing penalty applied. Assuming a basic professional Mechanic skill of 12, the cumulative chance of driving for over three intervals without problems is 0.3%, with a 12% chance of a Critical Failure.

* Note the use of "three months" is relative to the maintenance interval of the vehicle, reflecting the 154h of the Ford Mustang (see p. VEL 61) and relative frequency of use.

Even if a vehicle does not outright fail when a maintenance interval runs through, it will probably run dirtier. Fuel-burning engines will exhume more and darker exhaust. Electric vehicles may consume power faster. This would be fixed "automatically" when the necessary work is done. The extra dirt in the system can build up and clog filters, Sound Baffling, and anti-pollution devices.

The following table contains a brief list of work that can be performed on a vehicle while in a shop. All can be optional maintenance, but not all are required to pass safety inspections.

Minimum skill Difficulty Penalty	6 Trivial (no roll needed)	8 Simple (skill)	10 Average (skill-2)	12 Hard (skill-5)
1-3 1	Topping up fluids	Changing oil	Changing a side window	Changing cylinder head
1-3 2	Changing battery	Rotating tires	Changing shock absorbers	Replacing muffler system
1-3 3	Changing headlight	Replacing dashboard light	Installing alarm	Replacing wheel bearings
1-3 4	Changing tire	Changing spark plugs	Installing remote start	Rebuilding a motor
1-3 5	Changing air filter	Replacing the windshield	Replacing brake pads	Straightening the frame
1-3 6	Changing wiper blades	Changing washer pump	Replacing radiator	Replace part of drive shaft
4-6 1	Replacing antenna	Installing a (cell phone) antenna	Replace a fuel pump	Replacing a water pump
4-6 2	Replacing tail/signal lights	Replacing the alternator	Replace a power mirror	Replacing a steering box
4-6 3	Applying decals	Painting the body	Fixing wiring	Replacing a turbocharger
4-6 4	Mounting fog lamps	Fixing a bullet hole	Fixing side panel damage	Replacing a fuel control unit
4-6 5	Rigging trailer power port	Adding a trailer hitch*	Replacing a transmission	Installing armor fibers
4-6 6	Touching up scratches	Mount a spotlight on body	Replace brake/fuel lines	Repairing collision damage

* Not all vehicles' frames are designed to take a trailer hitch. At the GM's option, the end result may not be street legal, perhaps requiring a HT roll each time it endures stress to avoid failure.

If a GM is considering using these rules, then in specialized or large shops or in military vehicle pools some mechanics may take Optional specializations in certain parts or vehicle systems. Some examples are exhaust systems, body work, and glass.

Damage Control

Some car owners seek extra protection for their travels and the travels of those to whom they lend the vehicle. Memberships in organizations such as *GURPS Autoduel's* ADAA, or the real-world [AAA](#), as well as some auto manufacturers, can provide travel advisories, and some levels of memberships include free roadside assistance. Within 30 minutes to two hours, a tow truck can be at the scene of the breakdown to fix a flat tire, jumpstart the car, or open the door if the keys are locked inside (if it can't be done [over the phone](#)). Lastly, if the problem is beyond the skill of

the tow truck operator, then the vehicle can be towed to a local garage. All this and more can be included in the monthly membership fee.

"Too early for flapjacks?"

-- Phil Conners, *Groundhog Day*

Speeding into Harm's Way

Official **GURPS** stats for a TL7 police cruiser can be found on p. C75. For radar and laser speed guns as well as breath alcohol testers, see pp. C 71-72. A few other suggestions to pull PCs over for are Imprudent Driving (weaving dangerously, even onto the shoulder), a burnt out headlight (even during the day), expired registration, simple "spot checks" for seatbelts, possession of alcohol, and dangerous weapons. In a city, many failed Driving rolls (remember, only required in stressful situations) will cause collisions. Any modern vehicle collision on public roads will be considered an "accident" and both drivers are expected to pull over to inspect damages (if any) and exchange license information. In some areas, the police and insurance companies do not need to be notified if no one was hurt, and the cost to repair all damages in the accident is less than about \$700 (the movie *Blank Check* revolved around this idea). Years of accident-free driving can greatly diminish insurance costs, and new drivers on probation can lose their license if found at fault.

Parking

Many adventures call stalwart heroes to the towers of the city center to visit the city hall of records, police headquarters, general hospital, or the main office for a financial institution such as a bank. Timing can be critical, and no less critical is the parking outside the building. In busy areas, the meters may be limited to one hour (or 30 minutes) instead of the typical two hours. Drivers should also be careful, as the laws in many cities stipulate that once the maximum time is up the car must be moved through an intersection before it can be legally parked again. In such a situation, putting another coin in the meter will not help if the vehicle is not moved first. The meter police can often tell because they put a chalk mark on a tire that is rubbed off after one drives a little ways.

"Is that your car? / Mind if I skip rocks across it?"

--Melissa/Tom Servo, *Mystery Science Theater 3000: A Touch of Satan*

Getting Rid of It

One of the fastest ways to legally get rid of a vehicle is to drive or tow it to a junkyard or scrap dealer. If the character performs well with Merchant/Fast-Talk/a Good Reaction/Luck, they might get from 2% to 10% of the value at a junk yard, while at a scrap dealer, one may get pennies for each pound left there (perhaps up to 2% of the worth of the vehicle). A way to model actually selling it is to treat it like Advertising for a Job, with all modifiers. Some voluntarily take the vehicle for the safety inspection to improve their vantage point as a seller. GMs may want to be generous in providing a bonus to the Merchant roll to sell it if the player wants to RP all of this. Once it is gone, a character should make an Accounting or Merchant to remember to cancel the insurance and license! Some people dutifully pay the companies for years after they've sold their vehicle, not noticing that they are paying to insure a car that was sold. At the GM's whim, there may even be a local charity that will come and tow the vehicle away, leaving a tax-deductible receipt for it (for the value if given to a junk yard) or an annual bus pass!

Driving Around the World: The International Driver's License

An International Driving Permit is a little-known facet of the UN that permits [signing countries](#) to agree to honor each other's licenses. This document is practically a Rosetta stone: a copy of the original translated into [eight languages](#), so that when it is presented along with the original, the local constabulary can understand it instantly. Such a document may be invaluable to globetrotting adventurers, but it requires annual renewal.

Germany

For Germans, passing a driver's education course is mandatory before one can take the real exams.

Every two years, citizens are required to have their vehicles inspected by an agency such as the Technischer Ãœberwachungsverein for safety and environmental impact. Inspections performed by the TUV (or other German agencies) require HT rolls at -5 to pass (see "Used Cars" above).

Russia

Civilians staying in Russia for less than six months looking to drive need only carry a translated version of the license with them (the government provides translation service for a fee). A stay of greater than six months requires one to bring a medical certificate, a valid driver's license, and the translated version thereof to a police station. The resulting license will be valid for the duration of their visa.

There are some reports that underpaid officials may attempt to extort or be prone to being bribed. The accuracy of these testimonies is up to the GM.

Saudi Arabia

Women are forbidden from driving cars and bicycles, and riding with any male other than her husband or immediate male relative. In conservative areas, a public stoning of violators of taboo is not uncommon, even if the violators are foreigners.

The minimum driving age is 25, and many driving offenses carry an automatic prison sentence. Many taxis do not have meters, and thus fares should be negotiated in advance. A visitor's driver's permit is valid for three months before it must be renewed. Cars drive on the left, and many natives use turn signals to signal if it's [safe to pass or not](#).

Sinister Driving Customs

There are many countries in which one drives on the left. Three popular left-handed countries to tour are Australia, Japan, and United Kingdom. A more complete list may be found [online](#). Visitors unfamiliar with the driving rules may suffer a familiarity penalty of -2 (see p. B43). Eight hours of practice or 32 hours of normal driving (see On The Job Training, p. B83) will eliminate this.

"Dad used to let me back the car up the driveway. Once."

-- The adult Allan Parish, *Jumanji*

Driver's Training

In North America, the first step to receive a license is written theory. The student may spend up to 50 hours studying theory in a classroom. Next, the student must pass an official written test for learner's permit, which is taken at a government office. Once the student has passed this test, they begin approximately 50 hours of practice driving with a trainer. They are often paired with another student in the same car as the instructor for economy and so both can learn from the same mistakes. Once this is complete, they may attempt the official driving test. Driver's Education training as described nets the student 1/2cp in Driving (Automobile), which for an average person with DX 10 gives skill 7. Any training with a certification should have at least 1/2 cp invested in the skill, any more points will likely be "on the job" training (see p. B83) counting only the time the character drives.

Separate training and testing is required for motorcycles (Motorcycle skill) and busses and large trucks (Driving (Heavy Wheeled) skill). **GURPS** draws the line at five tons. Other vehicles (and their skills) are usually not street-legal (Mecha, Tracked, Construction Equipment), but licensing may not be required if operated on private property.

For more details, see pp. CI 123 & VE 143, and note they supercede the skills listed on p. B68.

Many locales demand annual license renewal (often around one's birthday). However, a new picture, and thus presence at the Department of Motor Vehicles, may only be required every four years; this becomes important if one leaves the city. An intermediary may be able to cover for the former, but not the latter. Other nations (such as Germany, above) do not require one to update their photo, instead relying on a national photo ID. Forging a license would be a useful form of ID for practically everything but actually driving (given modern police computers and networks). See GURPS Covert Ops pp. 25 and 50 for details on the mechanics of forging Driver's Licenses.

Losing a Driver's License can be easy. In some places getting caught for driving over double the speed limit will do it, while others involve civic disorder. In the short term, it might be confiscated by a business owner who believes (or says they believe) it to be a forgery (even though this action may not be legal). Many countries use a "merit/demerit" system in which fault-free driving ties in with discounts to insurance costs. One large infraction, or a number of smaller infractions "cost" points, and when they exceed a limit, the license is lost.

"Two Tanks!"

"Yeah, but look at them."

"They're at least 100 years old!"

"The Tank Police will die of laughter!"

-- Buaku, Annapuma and Unipuma, *Dominion Tank Police*

Advantages and Disadvantages

Reputation +1 (Driver's Education Graduate, A small group of people, all the time)[1]: This will improve your reaction to insurance agents, and some public officials who deal with licensing. To some Jocks, this advantage may be the considered analogous to Honor Student (see p. IOU 18 for both advantages), and possibly be worth a small Secret.

Reputation - (Drives a "cool"/"uncool" car) (Large class of people, Sometimes)[+ or -1/level]: This reaction could apply to conversations in and around the vehicle, and about the topics of travel and recreation. However, it can also provide an inverse reaction when dealing with some law enforcement officers who distrust people in "cool" cars (if this Reputation were positive, it would become negative and vice versa).

Reputation (No Driver's License): Within circles that care, this disadvantage may be the equivalent of Social Stigma (Second Class Citizen) or Social Stigma (Barbarian). Alternately, it could be treated as Reputation (can't pass driver's test).

"Your sons flew that enchanted car of yours to Surrey and back last night!"

-- Mrs. Weasley, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

Driving the Plot

New drivers, and persons from outside TL6 to TL8 may forget that fuel needs to be purchased every 200-300 miles, and that the oil needs to be changed every 2000-3000 miles. Every 24,000 to 36,000 miles the transmission fluid should be changed, and tires will wear out in 40,000 to 50,000 miles, even less if they are not balanced and aligned properly. Balding tires can inflict a penalty of -1 to -3 to Driving rolls; this penalty is doubled in wet and icy conditions! See pp. B187-188, VE151 for more road modifiers.

Rental cars (see p. VE200) can have hidden flaws, and provide good red herrings and plot devices. Cars are useful targets for agencies trying to get close to a party. Vehicles are often the targets of electronic bugs, homing devices, tracers, and bombs. Vehicles with computerized controls may be vulnerable to hacking, which is made easier with a physical interface, such as a SQUID (see p. R30) or just a small computer with radio relay. A textbook example of this can be found in the movie *Batman Returns*, where the Penguin attached a remote control device to the Batmobile. Such is at best embarrassing and inconvenient, and at worst may get one in trouble with the law if a traceable vehicle

is used to commit crimes.

"Unfortunately, the car will never fly again. It actually flew?"

-- "Doc" Brown, *Back to the Future, Part III*

Bibliography

Useful Pyramid Links

- ["Why Don't We Do It in the Road?"](#) by Andy Vetromile -- History and present uses of roads
- [Horror Vehicles: Prowlers](#) by Scott Maykrantz
- ["PC Vehicles for Transhuman Space: Car as the Star"](#) by Phil Masters
- ["Tech Magic"](#) -- Includes Seek Machine, Glitch, Machine Control, Propel, and more (Later published in **GURPS Grimoire**) by S. John Ross
- ["Universal Breakdown Manual"](#) by Eric Funk
- An interesting alternative may be to use the article [The Noble Steed](#) by Ann Dupuis, with the advantages and disadvantages like a [Ship Patron](#) from Traveller (*Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society* subscription required)
- ["The Garage: Samples for GURPS Vehicles Lite"](#) by Kenneth Peters

Web Links

- [GURPSNet Vehicles Archive](#)
- [GURPSNet Vehicles of the Week](#)
- [MapQuest directions and maps](#)
- [Driving in Germany](#)
- [Driving - The German Way](#)
- [A Guide to Driving in Russia](#)
- [Travel Tips on Saudi Arabia](#)
- [AAA International Driving Permit](#)
- [International Driving Document](#)
- [Howstuffworks.com "Car Channel"](#)

Pyramid Review

Sharn: City of Towers (for Eberron)

Designed by Keith Baker & James Wyatt

Edited by Bill Slavicsek

Art by Robert Raper, Wayne Reynolds, Daniel Hawkins, Dennis Kauth, Rob Lazzaretti, Jason Alexander, Tomm Coker, Eric Deschamps, Tomas Giorello, Howard Lyon, Charles P. Morrow, Lucio Parrillo, Steve Prescott, Francis Tsai, Anne Stokes, Anthony Waters, & James Zhang

192-page full-color hardback & 45-minute instrumental music CD; \$29.95

The darkness that Wizards of the Coast tried for (and missed) in the *Eberron* core rulebook is actually starting to take shape in the second hardback in the series. *Sharn: City of Towers* brings more of that Dashiell Hammett feel to the surface by touring through the many levels of the lofty city.

Sharn is the largest city in Khorvaire and, though not its capital, vital to the nation of Breland. Everyone and everything goes through it (or ends up there), including transportation and communication systems . . . to say nothing of the fact that anyone wanting to go to the dark continent of Xen'drik will probably use it as a home base. Divided in many ways -- by economics, by neighborhoods, by towers -- it sits on a fiery foundation, massive lakes of fire used as forges by the goblinoids before they were driven from the area. Since then the town has undergone many changes, and now those industrial underpinnings are called the Cogs. The further up the towers you go, the better the standard of living becomes, until finally you reach veritable mansions at the tops of the spires -- or floating far above them. The city shares a manifest zone that makes spells of flight easier, allowing for a town built vertically at the edge of the Dagger and Hilt Rivers.

Each section is somewhat different in tone, population, and architecture. From Menthis Plateau, home of the quintessential seat of learning Morgrave University; to Central Plateau, wherein all power and wealth is concentrated; to the walls of Cliffside where all ships (those of both the sea and the sky) convene to trade, the "City of Knives" will accommodate most character and adventure types. The book has plenty of threats to throw at the town, some generic suggestions that might intrigue the PCs, and some offenses built into the setting that are already gearing up to take Sharn down one dragonmarked house at a time.

A gazetteer occupies most of the pages. Describing what goes on in which sector and where the different dragonmarked houses hold sway are just a few of the details available. To do the city justice, there are countless entries on what types of businesses are where, what the population divisions are, how closely the town's Watch keeps track of things (or how easily they can be bribed in that neighborhood), and what personalities give that street or level its character. Each part has specific businesses or locations that make adventure development faster for the DM, and given how many of them the authors had to come up with, they managed to keep things pretty fresh.

And the curious nature of the city's layout isn't just glossed over. The book recognizes the dangers and realities of living on streets, balconies, and ledges open to a drop of dozens if not hundreds of stories. Folks tend to wear magic talismans with *feather fall*, for example, and there's a reward for any mage who uses magic to catch a falling citizen. Natural disasters aren't shut out, either, and the dependence on the magic surrounding the area is an important element in business and politics.

The prestige classes seem less like page filler and more like an integral part of the setting here, particularly the mages specializing in flight and the city's elite soldiers; unfortunately, the wand magicians come off impotent and dull by comparison. Creatures fit the theme, too (such as the wraith born of the forges), and the magic includes aerial items and new attack spells that will hinder one's enemies without bringing down the whole house of cards.

In fact, most chapters and subjects -- the law, the weather, the geography, daily life -- are short and to the point except for those aforementioned pieces that describe the city. Like the core book, this proves the book's biggest shortcoming: To do it right, you have to have a lot of material few people will enjoy reading. The creators do their best to keep it all from getting dull, and there are many good to great ideas buried in the pages, but you're in danger of nodding off more than once as you try to absorb all the information.

The color comes from artwork that uses the same comic-book visuals and painted depth as the core book, as well as an accompanying music CD. Clocking in at just over 45 minutes, it sets the mood with some good incidental tunes. The tribal piece in the middle kind of wanders oddly from the Middle East through Southeast Asia and Africa, landing in North America, and there should be a better sense of rising action near the end, but for a free disc? This is good accompaniment.

Add to this more of those random maps of locations of indeterminate utility, lists of holidays and citywide events, good campaign advice on making the city come alive and passing out treasure in an urban environment, and a random corpse chart, all to make up for the lack of an index, and you've got yourself a handsome supplement. Keeping its overall focus, ***Sharn: City of Towers*** eases some of the birthing pains for GMs looking to start a new ***Eberron*** campaign.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Fright Night: Asylum (for the *d20 System*)

Published by [Hogshead Publishing](#)

Written by Pete Lynn with Adrian Bott & Ian Sturrock

Cover by Shaun Thomas

Illustrated by David Esbri Molines, Marcio Fiorito, & Shaun Thomas

64-Page Perfect Bound Softback Book; \$15.95

Hogshead Publishing's *Fright Night* series of *d20 System* adventures is designed to serve up an easily played dose of horror. This is facilitated through the use of the regular *d20 System* rules rather than the more complex [d20 Modern Roleplaying Game](#) and by the use of set-ups familiar to the genre. In their first two *Fright Night* titles, *Haunted House* and *Polar Terror*, the expectations of the players come from having watched films like *The Haunting* (the original 1963 version by Robert Wise, not the unnecessary remake) and John Carpenter's *The Thing*. The third entry in the series will be not quite so familiar, but tales of madness, confinement, and terror are easy to evoke in *Fright Night: Asylum*.

The very first thing that strikes you about this book is the radical makeover it has been given. Hogshead Publishing's *d20 System* titles have in truth always looked a little mundane, but the use of a heavy courier typeface really works in the book's favor. True, it may be a little overwhelming at first, but it adds to the atmosphere. It is a pity that the various tables jar in their ordinariness. The artwork is also better handled than in previous titles. There is less of it and the various pieces are not used again to little or no effect. The maps are also clean and serviceable, but unfortunately they lack the details claimed in the text.

Designed for a party of four to six characters of first to third level, the set up of *Asylum* is simple. Players take the roles of celebrities, represented by six new classes: Actor, Artist, Millionaire, Pop Idol, Sports Star, and TV Show Host. Their careers may be on the up or on the slide, but each of their agents has arranged participation in a reality TV show. The exact nature of the show will be unknown to the characters, but will soon become apparent. They are "welcomed" as inmates at a mental institution, where the staff proves to have less than medical matters on their mind. The question is, are these newly incarcerated inmates really mentally ill, or are the doctors manipulating their minds so that they think they are?

Fright Night: Asylum is an opportunity to explore the enclosed paranoid world, with the GM given the tools to really play with the character's minds. This can be through the use of strange events out of keeping within the institution, the use of medical drugs and procedures -- perhaps unnecessary, and of course the use of many of the tools and devices found in both the genre and horror RPGs.

Of course, in the case of *Fright Night: Asylum* there is something going on. That something is actually very traditional for a horror scenario, but the setting makes it play very differently. The characters are normal people (although well-known as celebrities), not the traditional weapon-wielding combatants of the normal *d20 System*; and even if they had weapons training, there is virtually no such equipment available within the walls of the institution. The point is that the characters will have to survive by their wits, but this is where the author serves up his killer punch. In *Fright Night: Asylum*, it is the very wits of the characters that are under threat.

Beyond the need of the *Player's Handbook*, this book is very self-contained and self-supporting. First, it provides details of the six new classes, each of which makes use of the new "celebrity" feats. These include Artistic Temperament, Assume Command, Highly Strung, Plastic Surgery, and Try Another Take. Whether these new feats will play a part in the scenario is another matter, but they do serve to make the six new classes useful in other modern *d20 System* games.

The combat guidelines focus on the tools and devices that can be found in the asylum. They include first medical drugs plus a variety of equipment: electrical paddles (for resuscitation purposes), gas masks, stun guns, scalpels, and syringes. The latter are particularly nasty when used to deliver a bubble directly into the bloodstream. The rules on drugs are also slightly different, for when delivered directly into the bloodstream they are markedly more effective. When administered using the standard procedure, such drugs cannot be resisted, but if administered under stressful circumstances, characters treat the drug as if it were a poison.

The only major difference to the actual combat rules is in the Armor Class Bonus. Since no actual armor is available, a more experienced character instead gains an AC bonus, roughly equal to half his level, this represents experience giving him the smarts to get out of the way or take cover. Other new combat rules cover getting around in the dark, but these are standard to the *Fright Night* series as are its rules on scaring characters.

To turn them into victims, and to encourage them to react and act as victims, the GM makes two rolls. One to see the fright hit dice a creature or character the monster can scare and the other to how many hit worth of characters it does scare. The scare works as a ranged fear attack which players can make a will check against. Suggested bonuses to this roll are in keeping with the genre. While the rules are sound, they are not as comprehensive as in some games, which may disappoint some. This leaves plenty of room for GM input though.

When I was at the Hogshead Publishing stand at Gen Con UK, I asked for a book to review -- it was going to be *Fright Night: Haunted House*, but the owner's wife suggested I take *Asylum* instead as it was her favorite. So on her recommendation I did, and it is not difficult to see why it is her favorite. The set up for the adventure is excellent and it is clear that both author and publisher have worked hard to follow it through. The result is not quite so polished as one would wish, with more advice needed on handling psychological horror, especially for less-experienced GMs. Yet in the hands of an experienced referee, *Fright Night: Asylum* will really work well, serving up something akin to *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* meets *People Under the Stairs* with nods to *Spinal Tap*, *Big Brother*, and *Re-Animator* along the way.

There is something less forgiving with *Fright Night: Asylum*, and with their characters assaulted both physically and mentally, especially the latter, players will find this scenario a much greater challenge. It is more adult in its themes and as such cannot be recommended for anything less than mature players. Where the previous *Fright Night* titles have worked because of our familiarity with their set ups, *Asylum* works even better because it is not quite as familiar, and this combined with the efforts made to create and instill an atmosphere of fear and paranoia, means that *Fright Night: Asylum* is the best *d20 System* scenario from Hogshead to date.

--Matthew Pook

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Car Shopping (and Other Excursions into the World of Secrets and Lies)

For the first time ever, I purchased a new car last week. And by "new car," I mean a *new*, new car: 16 miles as I rolled it off the lot.

While I won't say it was the most painful experience of my life, it was certainly in the top 10. Over the course of two days (for a total of 14 hours), I visited seven car dealerships, test-drove seven vehicles, and encountered seven salesmen – most of whom, it seemed, spoke with a pressured urgency that gave the impression that it was perfectly natural to treat a \$15,000 purchase as an impulse buy. Couple all this with a couple dozen phone calls, haggling, paperwork nightmares, insurance shopping, and various other heartaches, and you've got a recipe for a miserable time. Oh, and let me not forget one of the most horrifying moments: my backing a test-drive vehicle into a wall.

Anyway, the excitement of owning a new vehicle somewhat mitigates the pain of purchasing one, in much the same way, I suppose, as the joy of being a mother allows our own species continues to propagate. But, seeing as how I'll never know a pain akin to pulling my lower lip fully over my head, I imagine the analogy falls a bit short.

But, you might ask, does this vehicular gloating satisfy any gaming desires for my column readers, or is it all a cheap ploy to be able to try claiming a new car purchase as a business expense?

I'm working on it, I'm working on it . . .

Got it!

There was much about the act of buying a car I found fascinating, as a newbie. Probably the most interesting was the art of the deal, where one learns to creatively lie and withhold information to get what one wants. Now, this extends beyond the usual dealer puffery ("Oh, sure, that car you're considering from the other dealer may have anti-lock brakes, but *our* vehicles are designed to never need stopping, so that frivolous extra isn't necessary . . ."). Rather, by the end I'd learned to lie and exaggerate myself.

In particular, I'd learned that making up any price and saying that another dealer is holding a car at that price was a surefire way to cut through a *lot* of haggling or other pressure. In fact, the car I ended up buying was a result of this technique; in one e-mail to the dealer I said, "I have a car waiting for me at another dealer [TRUTH] at \$X [LIE – ACTUAL PRICE WAS \$X+1,000], and I had another discount that they aren't honoring [PARTIAL TRUTH]. Can you match this price and give me the additional discount?" The short answer was, "Yes," and thus victory was mine!

(If you're going to use this technique, I strongly recommend stripping out the parts that say "[TRUTH]" and "[LIE].")

To extend this to gaming, in many games I've found myself withholding information, in an effort to "surprise" the GM as well as the rest of the group. The quintessential example of this I've written about [previously](#), but I'll recap here. Basically, my pious but Machiavellian ***Vampire: The Dark Ages*** character started making deals with a demon: The demon would give extra power, in return for favors to be named later. Now, I'd never revealed it to the GM (until, sadly, the subplot had passed), but my plan all along was to tell the demon, when he went to get me to serve him, "No thanks; I won't do your bidding. Send me to hell if you want, but be aware that I'll let your masters know you gave up power to serve the greater good, and didn't get anything out of it. Bad bargaining on your part." I don't know if this would've worked as a player, but my character found the plan foolproof.

Another example, this time in the dungeon-crawling vein. In a classic ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*** campaign (I don't know if it was first or second edition), the GM was somewhat generous with magical treasure in the same way the classic material was always generous: lots of minor magical weapons, with little stuff of more power. One of the players dutifully gathered all the *sword+1s* (the weakest magical sword) they came across and put them in some kind of portable-hole-type storage device. The other players would routinely say, "Are you going to do anything with

those," and he'd reply, "No, not really." The campaign continued for a looooooong time. Eventually, the characters grow to mighty heroes, and the player's sword-gathering habit had more or less been shrugged away (especially since, at that power level, they were practically useless). Finally, the GM planned an epic battle, where the heroes needed to raise an army using the **Battlesystem** mass combat rules. Once the ragtag army of soldiers was amassed, the player sprang his "trap," giving magic swords to every member of entire units. The player had managed to amass over 1,000 low-powered magical swords during the course of the campaign. In the **Battlesystem**, having units that are entirely equipped with magical weapons is a phenomenal advantage, and their units ended up cleaning the clocks of their opposition.

Personally, I live for these moments, both as a player and a GM. The thrill of the surprise is one of the primary reasons I game. (It's also the biggest reason I tease cats, but that's beside the point.) However, some groups treat these surprises as unwelcome; they feel the players "tricked" the GM by exploiting a plot hole, rule quirk, or the like.

Still, I like 'em. However, if I was going to offer advice to players looking to add these surprises to a campaign, I'd have a few "rules" of honor I'd follow:

Without being direct, confirm what you're doing with everyone (although not *why* you're doing it). In the case of the demon, I confirmed (in front of the other players) that I got the power now, and I'd have to repay the favor later. In the **Dungeons & Dragons** game, one player eventually became known as the guy who collected magic swords. In this way, people won't think you just made up the surprise later. ("Yeah, uhhh . . . I've been collecting pennies for the past six game years. Didn't I mention that? I imagine I should have a warehouse full by now . . .")

Don't be afraid to "lie." Within the guideline above, it should be possible to lie (in character), if it means keeping the surprise. The sword-collector knew what his eventual goal was, and so did my demon-dealer. Having said that, if the GM specifically asks what you have planned, it might be good to tell him (privately); alternatively, it might be possible to say, "I have a plan I'd rather not reveal right now, if that's okay."

Accept that the "surprise" might not happen. In the **Vampire** game, the demon was killed before it could demand anything of me. In the **Dungeons & Dragons** game, the hero's portable hole could have been stolen or a similar setback. Although GMs aren't under any obligation to fulfill players' wishes, that's especially true if the GM doesn't know what the wish is.

Be fully prepared for the surprise not to work, even if you get to do it. Especially if you're not letting anyone else know about your plan, it's entirely possible for a long-term surprise to fizzle out or not work as expected.

If you keep these guidelines in mind, you might be able to create a memorable moment within a game by withholding all the facts, lying about what you know, and preparing for the big deal. Who knows? You might end up getting the better end of a deal with a demon; they can't be any worse than most car salesmen.

--Steven Marsh

Designer's Notes: GURPS Infinite Worlds

by Kenneth Hite

*Fathers! Your virtues, such the power of grace,
Their spirit, in your children, thus approve.
Transcendent over Time, unbound by place,
Concord and charity in Circles move.*
-- William Wordsworth, *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, XIV

It seemed like a three-inch putt, a slam dunk, a veritable gimme. All I had to do was take the best of **GURPS'** pre-existing alternate-worlds material, an embarrassment of riches if ever there was one, and turn it into **GURPS Infinite Worlds**. No sweat, he thought. The only thing really missing was a really useful, solid set of guidelines for alternate history construction. So of course, assembling and expanding **Infinite Worlds** from **GURPS Time Travel**, both **GURPS Alternate Earths** books, and Chapter 20 of the new Fourth Edition **GURPS Basic Set** took me twice as long as I thought it would, and likely three times as long as the long-suffering Andrew Hackard thought it would.

Part of the challenge was simply updating everything, and not merely to Fourth Edition rules. (Although that was no picnic in its own right, since I started work on **Infinite Worlds** before the Fourth Edition was finalized.) I also had to look at the last 10 years of world-historical theory, and the last 15 years of time travel and alternate history SF. For example: **GURPS Time Travel** predates Harry Turtledove's *Worldwar* series, and **GURPS Alternate Earths** predates Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. What I wrote needed to reflect those changes to the genre and the subject matter, to the extent it could. I took this most seriously in Chapter Three, the "Building An Alternate Earth" chapter, which I divided into two main sections. The first, and one of the trickiest to make work, was a random history generation system, modeled after the wonderful random planet generator in **GURPS Space**. In a game about infinite worlds, it seemed odd that we didn't have a way for the GM to create them in bulk. What I came up with may not be the first such system (I'm fairly sure that **Fringeworthy** must have one, for example), but it's the first one that actually pays attention to any sort of historical rigor whatsoever. The second half of that chapter is an extended summary of the current state of historical modeling, with as much rigor as possible while exhibiting a massive bias toward usefulness in designing alternate histories. That, for instance, is why there's a summary of the completely daft "biological history model" of Oswald Spengler in there -- it's nonsense, but Poul Anderson, James Blish, and other top-notch SF writers have used it to design future histories that feel real. Other stuff I tossed into the mix included Strauss and Howe's generational history, the "Kondratiev wave" in economics, and as much as we know (not much) about climate change cycles. The result may not be history as we know it, but it is definitely history as I design it, which seems preferable for roleplaying games.

But mostly I adapted, adopted, and improved, as the Round Table motto has it. David Pulver had (very flatteringly) added the Cabal, reality quakes, and a crosstime-capable Reich-5 to the basic Infinite Worlds setting; I had to figure out how they worked in the here-and-now, and how to explain them to people who hadn't read what I had written about them already. Most of my work was just such building on foundations laid by Steve Jackson, John M. Ford, and Dave Pulver. What did the "10 divisions" in the I-Cops and "eight divisions" in the Scouts do, exactly? What's happened to Reich-5's Japan in the last 20 years? How does John W. Campbell's death abort scientific progress, again? I expanded some things, brushed past some others, and knit the result into a (hopefully) consistent whole. Much of it was actually fun -- I enjoyed going into lurid detail on just how Nazi Science Crossed The Feeble Dimensional Barrier. I added relatively few original ideas to the mix: a crosstime mining corporation run by a parallel Cecil Rhodes, a dozen new alternate Earths to play with, some alternate human races (Morlocks, mutants, Neanderthals, super-soldiers), my standard "campaign parameters" discussion, and some more bad guys for the Order of the Hourglass to fight.

I also added a lot of other stuff that came right back out again, when the book shrank from 256 pages to 240. (You may imagine my delighted reaction, having nearly killed myself, and Andrew, to produce the 256 pages in question.) Some of those pages -- yet more alternate Earths (possibly including my "Turtledove tribute" featuring a Gormelite

invasion in the 1960s), and my fantasy crossworld setting "Collegio Januari" -- are apparently slated for e23 releases, so I shan't include them here. But some of the deleted gems were too diffuse to make anything but the cutting-room floor, so I present them now to you fine people. The first section is my attempt to add a future to the Infinite Worlds -- the Promelleans, specifically, are a "GM's friend" to help move PC parties from the Infinite Worlds setting into any future-SF type setting. (Steve didn't like them. Ah, well.) The second bit just compiles a few of the Things That Can Go Wrong with dimension or time travel in general. The eagle-eyed may note a bit of Lovecraftian dues-paying in each section -- I say, if you're going to model a genre, you'd better steal from its best.

Two Dooms: The Future

Although the vast majority of Infinity's experience is (somewhat ironically) confined to the present in its myriad alternate forms, at least two "futures" interact occasionally with Homeline's own era. There are, of course, hundreds, if not thousands, of "time travel reports" and "visitor sightings" choking the Patrol archives, some of them even filed by Patrolmen. Of the reliable "UFB" (Unidentified Future Being) sightings, the vast majority falls into one of two categories: the coleopteran travelers, or the Promelleans. Each claims to come from a future that might be labeled "posthuman," although the details are sketchy at best.

These two futures are not necessarily incompatible, but they differ in the few details generally agreed upon, and of course, in their representatives in the Infinite Worlds' present. Indeed, many Infinity researchers believe both visitor groups come from wildly divergent worldlines, and unaware that they have crossed quantum barriers in their journey, have assumed that they have traveled into their own past. Other investigators of the UFB phenomenon tentatively accept the visitors' claims at face value, but argue that the future per se is a constant state of quantum indeterminacy. In short, the future is not just infinite, it's infinitely fuzzy. By this logic, astrally projecting scarabs and blue quantum fogs are no more or less unreasonable than any other possible future, since nothing exists yet on which to base rationality.

This certainly does little to explain anything, but it does let Infinity higher-ups feel better. The notion that some unimaginable posthuman entities are treating the present the way that Infinity treats the parallel Earths -- as a mere backdrop for their own ineffable activities -- is deeply unsettling to some.

Coleopteran Travelers

Millions of years in the future, after the extinction of mankind, the dominant life form will be a coleopteran species descended from the Egyptian scarab, or dung beetle. This is the unflattering tale told by travelers from that future, or rather pieced together from a century and a half of psychiatric records across seven or eight parallel Earths.

According to this fragmented tale, a race of psionic time travelers from another star occupies the bodies of the beetle-things. It sends the minds of its scouts throughout time watching for signs of its enemies, of which little but superstition is known. They travel by means of a one-way projector that disappears after use -- whether it travels with them materially, or vanishes into acausality, is unclear.

Humans possessed by the coleopteran travelers evince total amnesia, accompanied by confusion about the most elementary details of their own culture. They often show language skills they never previously possessed, and their handwriting becomes odd and spiky, as though they were unused to handling pens. These spells last from three to seven years, during which they drain their savings traveling to remote corners of the Earth (especially Australia, the Carpathian Mountains, and the Dakota Badlands) and research the most abstruse possible combination of paleontology, high-energy astrophysics, and occultism. Shortly after completing this program, they return home, lock themselves indoors, and return to their old personalities overnight with no sensation of elapsed time.

Very occasionally, one of these returned personalities will start having nightmares about life in a hollow complex of tubes and passages, in which he has been transformed into an enormous beetle.

Promelleans

The Promelleans are a bright blue quantum fog of distributed nanobots from the 61st century. Whether they are humans using these fogs as their time machines, transhumans who take this form, or alien entities with human-seeming habits and personalities is unknown to Infinity and seems irrelevant to the Promelleans. Their nanobots cannot be harmed by any technology that Infinity is aware of, and have a high magic resistance. Psis attempting to contact the Promelleans wind up unconscious or frozen -- or vanished, snatched to the future by these enigmatic beings.

The Promelleans are timenappers, taking individuals or small groups of people from certain timelines, often saying to those left behind "This one is needed." Such witnesses are almost always all from the same Earth; Promelleans seldom appear to mixed groups of locals and travelers. Promelleans usually take some care not to abduct people in public or flashy ways, although some high-profile historical "vanishings" such as that of the prophet Elijah may be records of Promellean operations. Promelleans may also be behind some of the vanished conveyors from both Centrum and Infinity; they seem to "select" for targets with broad experience across the quantum stream.

Nobody knows exactly what happens to the kidnap victims, although occasional reports exist of encounters with Promelleans speaking in voices similar to those of vanished Patrol personnel. The Promelleans themselves are no help on the matter, restricting their discussions to oracular pronouncements about the "tree of futures," delphic warnings against "the dead time," or vague promises of "a future of all times and worlds." The most consistent element of Promellean ideology seems to be distrust of someone or something called "the Vortun." Promelleans often admonish Patrolmen against "the Vortun agenda" and sometimes kill people who they identify as "Vortun agents." Whether the Vortun are a faction within the Promelleans, a rival race or transhuman entity, or Promelleans from an alternate future, remains a mystery. No reports exist of any Patrolman meeting a self-identified Vortun.

Three Hazards

The Hounds of Time

These semi-material beings travel in packs of two to seven and leave no tracks aside from the occasional claw mark, but give off a strange temporal signature, detectable by tachyon tanks and other systems. They resemble long, thin quadrupeds built of badly overlapping plates of bluish clay with occasional chinks between where nothing at all shows up. Their heads are indistinct, only their snouts, tongues, and eyes appearing with any clarity.

They roam around waste spots in time, the aftershocks of reality quakes, the tangled detritus of paradox or shifted echoes, and the edges of some ghost roads or dimensional highways. If they catch the scent of a time traveler, they will track him across the millennia (at a top speed of 100 million years per day). If they spot their prey on another world, they have to go all the way back to 3.5 billion years ago before the alternate worlds broke apart, and then track him back down the correct worldline. They may nest back in that primordial era. The traveler will feel them approach him from out of time, as if he had the Death Vision spell (p. B251) cast on him every day until their arrival.

When they catch him, they materialize from out of the nearest acute angle and attack with their claws and then try to core their target's heart out with their rough, hollow tongue (which resembles the proboscis of a mosquito, only much larger). It does 2d large piercing damage from the attack, and coats the wound with a bluish saliva which does 2d more points of corrosion damage every round until washed off. For some reason, the hounds do not like to cross curved lines; hiding in a domed structure (or better yet a spherical chamber) offers some protection.

Hounds of Time

ST 16; **DX** 10; **IQ** 4; **HT** 20.

Will 17; **Per** 17; **Speed** 7.5; **Dodge** 10; **Move** 7.

SM 0; 100 lbs.

Traits: Discriminatory Smell; **DR** 2; Dread (Curved lines); Jumper (Time); Quadruped; Regeneration (Extreme);

Spirit; Striker (Tongue); Talons; Terror 5.

Skills: Brawling-14; Tracking-17.

The Green Zone

However, conveyors don't always work correctly. About one percent of the time, the journey seems to take time. And sometimes, it seems to take a long time indeed, or pass through some other kind of reality entirely (see *Fascinating Parachronic Disasters*, p. B532). The space between the worlds apparently *can* have a physical component. Paralabs physicists call it "hyperspace," and note that the speed of light (or possibly the duration of a second) becomes highly variable in that dimension. The few Patrolmen who have been there call it the "Green Zone," and there are rumors that at least one conveyor -- "the Lost Capsule" -- is still there, its crew unaware that they are even missing. Over a pint at Harry's, they say that sometimes the Lost Capsule shows up, faintly, at your own jump point, and then you know something bad is going to happen that trip.

Fortunately, an intact conveyor keeps a closed circuit of its own reality (probably thanks to the parachronic drive in operation), so even if the conveyor passes through the Green Zone, the Patrolmen inside are safe. Of course, not all conveyors *are* fully intact before a jump, what with suspicious gun-toting locals being not uncommon on the various parallel Earths. The Green Zone can then affect the travelers.

Exposure to the Green Zone forces a Fright Check at -5 on all who gaze into it; the human mind can't process the roiling otherness of it. In addition to any other consequences of the Fright Check, exposure to the Zone can turn its victims immaterial, creating a danger of rematerializing inside a solid object. They might also turn invisible (permanently or temporarily but never controllably). It can also set witnesses on fire (one unfortunate victim burned for 18 days), freeze them in time forever, or reduce them to point-size singularities that shoot off at high speed. Critical failure on the Fright Check should impose at least 25 or 30 points of disadvantages, even if it doesn't beam the poor wretch into a bulkhead. The GM decides whether to make PCs risk such horrific fates, or whether to save the 18-day fire for NPCs in the conveyor. More positively, exposure to the Green Zone can be an opportunity for characters to add psionic or other supernatural advantages (Jumper, Insubstantiality, Invisibility, and a pyrokinetic Innate Attack seem to match the lore) "awakened" or "implanted" by the stress, although a heavy compensatory set of disadvantages would not be out of line either.

Some methods of parachronic travel, notably sailing on the *USS Eldridge*, pass through the Green Zone and offer little or no protection to crewmen on the "deck" of the craft.

Really Weird Accidents

The Bailey Effect: The travelers reappear instantaneously at the moment they left -- except they've erased their own personal lifeline somehow. Just like George Bailey in *It's A Wonderful Life*, there is no record of their existence (the equivalent of Zeroed, p. B100), their friends never met them, their mothers never raised them, and so forth. (Characters with Temporal Inertia (p. B93) remain unaffected.) At the GM's discretion, the world might be altered, or others might have saved the transport or thwarted Mr. Potter in their absence. (If one of the travelers invented the time machine, it might never have existed either!)

The Lie Agreed Upon: The travelers arrive in their target era -- except that it's not historically accurate, but a kind of semi-literate Hollywood pastiche of the era. Cavemen fight dinosaurs, the Library of Alexandria has a "Lost Books" section and a card catalog, and Napoleon is always grabbing his stomach and ranting about being short. This can be played for farce, or as a deadly threat to the fundamental reality of the cosmos.

Welcome Back: History has "moved aside" to let the characters in. The opposite of the Bailey Effect; the travelers arrive to find themselves a known and registered part of their target era with friends, parents, and enemies in it. Their new lives parallel their lives in the present as closely as possible -- a scientist traveling to ancient Rome might "become" a priest of Apollo, for instance. The longer they stay in the past, the more their "present" memories erode; the travelers must make a Will roll at an additional -1 every time they wake up to remember their true identities.

(Characters with Temporal Inertia still have "new" lives, but suffer no memory erosion.) At the GM's discretion, this may produce Fright Checks or even mental disadvantages.

The Dead Past: The travelers arrive to find the past unchangeable. Perhaps time just doesn't advance while they're in the past, and they have to accomplish their mission during an eternal nanosecond. (This might actually make some missions -- like robbing the Louvre -- a lot easier!) Perhaps the travelers are only phantoms, unable to touch anyone or anything in the past. More subtly, they can never make any permanent impression on the past; people forget them right after talking to them, and anything they move returns to its original location when the travelers aren't looking.

The Five Movements of Magic

for *GURPS Magic*/*GURPS Grimoire*

by David Moore

"If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

- Sir Isaac Newton, in a letter to Robert Hooke, 5th February 1676

The **GURPS** technology books use a detailed system of "Tech Levels" to track scientific and technological progress from the rudest improvised tools of early Man to the miraculous powers of our star-faring descendants. With fine-tuning and creativity, the system adapts to any setting, giving general background -- to determine the tools and weapons available to characters -- or being central to a plot in which the players are inventors, industrial spies or saboteurs intent on steering or riding the tide of progress.

By contrast, magic is presented in **GURPS Magic** and **GURPS Grimoire** as an integral whole: in any world where magic exists and is practiced (and where associated technology, for the Radiation and Tech Colleges, is known), all or most spells can be learned and cast by any mage with the suitable prerequisites. The **Grimoire**, presuming that the GM's campaign has been using only **GURPS Magic** thus far, suggests ways for the new spells to be incorporated through invention or discovery; **GURPS Technomancer** presents an alternative Earth in which magic has recently arisen, where spells are still being researched and are the subject of an alternative arms race. In both cases, the spells and magical techniques not yet known are arbitrarily defined, or left in the hands of the GM. There's no structured progress defining the "state of magic" in society from basic principles to the most powerful and complex magic.

The Development of Magic

One reason for this is that magic is not, in spite of the famous Clarke quote, historically the direct equivalent of technology. Traditionally, magic is irrational; it is a means by which man's needs and wishes can be achieved without the required labor, by sheer willpower and the magical logic of sympathy and contagion. As such, there should be nothing anyone would want to do that magic *cannot* do. If a need arises for a spell the magician has never used, then he simply makes a new spell to fit that need. Unlike scientific advance, magical knowledge isn't generally contingent on conceptual advances, as the rules of magic are the same regardless of the power and sophistication of the spells being used.

Most magic in roleplaying games, however, follows a slightly more mechanistic logic, in deference to game balance and system design. Spells are studied, with some difficulty, and new spells need to be researched or taught by a more learned tutor; very powerful or unusual spells are jealously guarded secrets. Magic is graduated, with junior wizards needing to master weak or simple spells before they can tackle more potent or complex formulae. The need for study and research, and the development from weaker to more powerful techniques, most explicitly in **GURPS'** College and prerequisite system, make fantasy magic more closely parallel to technology. In such a setting, especially given wizardly co-operation within (and competition between) guilds or Hermetic orders, the magical "state of the art" can advance, each new generation of willworkers building on the insights of those who have gone before.

The Five Movements of Magic

What follows is one possible system for charting the magical development of a culture, from the crudest water-seeking rituals to the highest dimension-spanning disciplines. It proposes five phases of magical development, called *Movements*. Each Movement is broad, and encompasses several smaller improvements in the practice of magic. The Movements affect both which spells are known and used, and how some spells are cast (affecting casting time or spell rituals) or learned. Like Tech Levels, Movements can describe the campaign world's general state of magical

knowledge, or may be used to compare different nations' or organizations' progress, informing competition or cooperation between them. Fine-tuning the system may involve selecting individual advances from those described for each Movement, or applying them to separate colleges or applications as practiced in the world.

This system assumes, along with much of fantasy, a society that begins *technologically* crude, with magic partly replacing the function of science. Thus, natural and cosmological enquiry is driven by magic, gradually advancing the ideas required for higher magical development (elemental theory, for instance, or a cultural drive towards classification). Societies in which prior philosophical or scientific development have already furnished these conceptual advances, such as the ***Technomancer*** setting, might progress differently, or "jump" several Movements at once. See *The Sixth Movement?*, below, for more on the relationship between technology and magic.

First Movement: Intuitive Magic

During the first Movement, the very earliest principles of magic -- the magical laws of contagion and sympathy -- are laid out, and elaborate rituals invoking the one law or the other are required for even the simplest spells. Practitioners believe the power of their magic to rest in these rituals rather than themselves. In High Mana settings where anyone can learn and cast spells, the existence of Magical Aptitude is unknown, and even in Normal Mana worlds where Magery is required to cast spells it is seen as an external and impartial quality; mages are invested with divine or spiritual authority rather than an inborn capacity for magic. Spells stand alone, with no obvious connections between them, and spells that build upon simpler spells are not yet known. This early, common spells answer the immediate needs of agrarian society, neglecting more abstract principles.

System Effects

Basic Spells Only. Spells that have other spells as prerequisites do not yet exist, although spells with nonmagical advantages as prerequisites (such as Animal Empathy for Beast-Soother, or Danger Sense for Sense Danger) are known. Spells that require Magery are not known.

No Colleges. Spells are not yet organized into Colleges (or Celtic "Trees," or elemental affinities, etc.). One College Magery (p.M104) does not exist, and any spells or techniques defined by Colleges are not yet possible.

"Agrarian" Spells Only. The spells that are developed are those that affect animals, plants, food and water (for hunting and gathering); fire and light (for comfort); and the body and movement (for treatment, punishment and war). Taken with the above, this limitation essentially limits the First Movement mage to Beast-Rouser, Beast-Soother, Climbing, the Dull Senses spells, Fatigue, Haste, Ignite Fire, Itch, the Keen Senses spells, Lend Strength, Light, Sense Danger, Sense Foes, Sense Life, Seek Fire, Seek Plant, Seek Water, Test Food, and Touch.

Elaborate Rituals. Spells must always use full, elaborate rituals. When using the *Magic Rituals* rules (p.M7), First Movement spellcasters must always use both hands and feet and speak in a firm voice, regardless of how well they know the spells (if using the *Alternate Magic Ritual Rule* from the sidebar, mages *must* use the "enhanced" ritual, and get no bonus for it).

Magical Props. All spells must use props that invoke a contagious or sympathetic link to the desired effect. A mage could use a wand of scorched wood to cast Ignite Fire, a lock of the subject's hair for Itch, or a sculpture of an animal to cast Beast-Soother. As well as requiring the mage to carry about foci for each of his spells, this effectively doubles the duration of the ritual again as foci are incorporated, which means First Movement spells take *four times* the listed time to cast.

Note: At this stage, magical research is sporadic and limited, so significant variation is possible. Natural Spellcasters (p.CI41) are responsible for much of new magical knowledge, and generally know spells outside the above list, although they will be unable to teach them to others until the underlying principles are understood (ie. the required Movement is reached). Inherent Magic and Racial Spells may also lie outside the above list.

Second Movement: Utilitarian Magic

During this stage, the awe in which magic is held begins to fade and practitioners start to look on magic as a tool, to be applied, adapted and improved upon. Mages learn to work without mystical props, using rites that invoke the connection without needing the prop to be present, and simpler and less time-consuming rituals are developed. Perhaps most significantly, the discovery is made that the principles employed in the known spells can be adapted in more complex ways, allowing a skilled wizard to learn more powerful spells once he has mastered the initial canon. Existing spells that affect or sense thoughts or emotions allow mages to appreciate the division between body and mind, and mind control and thought-reading spells are learned as a consequence.

System Effects

Prerequisite Spells. Spells that have other spells as prerequisites are allowed. Note that spells which require Magery are still unknown.

No Colleges. Spells are still not organized into Colleges, so spells whose prerequisites include a certain number of spells from one College (such as Invisibility), or from a number of Colleges (such as Teleport), have not yet been developed.

Mind Spells Known. Any spells whose prerequisites are among the First Movement spells may be learned, within the limits specified above. This adds mind-affecting spells to the existing areas of influence.

Simple Rituals. Simpler spells are now known. Under the *Magic Rituals* rules, Second Movement spellcasters with skills of 12 or more may "speak a few quiet words and make a gesture," taking the listed time to cast their spells (if using the *Alternate Magic Ritual Rule* from the sidebar, mages needn't enhance the ritual, and get a +1 bonus if they do).

No Props. The spell caster may dispense with sympathetic props with no penalty, although he may cast the spell at a +1 if he uses one anyway.

Third Movement: Structured Magic

The third Movement sees the magical community continuing to assess the logic and structure of magic, and a formal, systemic worldview begins to emerge. In answer to this need, analytical Knowledge spells begin to be used. Spells are classified into Colleges, making the study of magic faster and simpler. Study of water and fire magic leads to the Elemental theory, and the development of air and earth magic; this new insight also allows Making and Breaking spells. Building on existing knowledge of light and darkness, the nature of sound is explored. Study of Colleges leads to the development of Improvised and Runic Magic. Finally, the innate quality of magical power is understood, and experiments into the early recognition of Magery are conducted, along with breeding experiments to determine its source. With the knowledge that magical power is chiefly internal, rituals are shortened and simplified.

System Effects

Colleges. With the development of Colleges, spells that specify a number of spell prerequisites by College are invented. Note that spells that require Magery are still not known.

Elemental Theory. The Colleges of Air and Earth join the mix. Elemental Sub-Colleges are not yet known.

New Spells. Knowledge, Making and Breaking and Sound spells are now known. Third Movement mages may learn spells from the Animal, Body Control, Communication and Empathy, Elemental (Air, Earth, Fire and Water), Food, Healing, Knowledge, Light and Darkness, Making and Breaking, Mind Control, Movement, Plant, Protection and Warning and Sound Colleges.

Improvised Magic. Improvised Spells and Rune Casting (pp.M85-93), if allowed by the GM, become available.

Simple Rituals. Yet simpler spells are known. Under the *Magic Rituals* rules, Third Movement spellcasters with skills of 15 or more may "speak a word or two and gesture," moving a hex on the same turn; those with skills of 18 or more may speak or gesture (if using the *Alternate Magic Ritual Rule* from the sidebar, all the reduced ritual options are available, although not all at once).

Fourth Movement: Abstract Magic

With the enlightenment of the third Movement, abstract philosophical thought is advanced. Fundamental questions of the nature of matter start to be asked and the boundaries of reality tested. Subtler classifications of matter are established. The nature of the sentient mind is scrutinized, and the interaction between perception and reality tested. As a result, later magic starts to manipulate that which is unreal, imagined, or conceptual, allowing mages to achieve feats that are genuinely unachievable by nonmagical means. Mages find spells that fool the senses with false conjurings, eventually leading to the creation of objects from nothingness. More perverse magic is also explored, as the necromantic arts that reverse or corrupt the magic of the body arise. The nature of Magery is now properly understood, and spells that better exploit the mage's sensitivity and power are researched. Since magic is now clearly understood to originate with the spellcaster, skilled mages learn how to internalize the process, dispensing with rituals altogether.

System Effects

Magery. Spells that require Magery to learn and cast become available. Note that spells requiring Magery 2 or 3 are still unknown.

New Elemental Colleges. The Elemental Sub-Colleges of Electricity, Ice and Weather are available, although without access to Magery 2 spells, the Acid College is still only theoretical.

New Colleges. The Illusion and Creation and Necromantic Colleges arise. The Enchantment, Gate, and Meta Colleges are still unknown.

No Rituals. Rituals can now be ignored by sufficiently skilled wizards. Use the *Magic Rituals* rules (or *Alternate Magic Ritual Rule* from the sidebar) without any limitation.

Fifth Movement: Higher Magic

In the fifth Movement, the theoretical limits of magic are explored. Magical research probes the limits of the known, eventually exploring time, space and other dimensions. The common sources of energy, inert matter, living tissue and the conscious mind are explored, allowing spells that create actual living beings, including elementals and enchanted automatons such as golems. Most profoundly, the underlying fabric of magic *itself* is studied, allowing wizards to develop spells that manipulate other spells. As an extension of this, it becomes possible to permanently store magical energy in objects, creating talismans and enchanted objects imbued with the powers of spells.

System Effects:

Higher Magery. Spells requiring Magery 2 or 3 are now known.

New Colleges. The Enchantment, Gate and Meta Colleges are available.

The Movements in the Campaign

The Movements are used in a fantasy campaign much the way technology is used in science fiction. Primarily, the GM can use it to define the general competence of magicians in the campaign world, and the direction future magic research will take. In a truly epic fantasy world, all wizards may have access to Fifth Movement magic, but a "standard" fantasy world is usually at the high end of the Fourth Movement, with only exceptional individuals or

secretive groups having access to Fifth Movement spells and techniques. A "low-fantasy" campaign, limited to the second or third Movement, permits spells that make life easier without providing for everything, leaving players to depend on other skills and resources as well. First Movement worlds have only simple and crude magic, best suited to a Stone Age game (see **GURPS Dinosaurs** and **GURPS Low-Tech** for more on Stone Age roleplaying).

Like Tech Levels, however, Movements are most useful in worlds where different groups, communities or cultures are at different stages of development. Some groups are one or more Movements ahead of others, or several groups are researching a higher Movement in competition, making progress in different areas. For example, in **GURPS Fantasy's** Yrth most of the world is at the fourth Movement, with provincial areas and low-mana Caithness at the third. Megalan and Wazifi rivals have achieved Fifth Movement in various areas: the Ministry of Serendipity have greater Mind, Knowledge and Meta magic, while the Caliph's wizards are skilled in the highest level in Healing, Protection and Warning, and Enchantment magic. Dwarven sorcerers, meanwhile, long ago mastered the Enchantment, Elemental and Making and Breaking Colleges, while Elves are most known for their ability with Animal and Plant magic; the Banestorm, of course, was created by Dark Elven dabbling in Gate magic. Characters from a higher or lower Movement than the campaign default should take Unenlightened or Higher Magic (see below).

Campaign Seeds

Espionage. The players are agents of a ruler, government, guild or college, sent to gather the magical secrets of a rival group, by enrolling as students, spying on their research, stealing their notes and grimoires, or whatever other means they can think of. With fine-tuning, this could be run as a spy game with powerful wizard patrons and highly-trained specialist PCs, a "magicpunk" story with double-crossing guild employers and desperate criminal PCs, or an *Illuminati*-style conspiracy game where the motivations of the agencies and patrons are poorly-understood and the missions apparently senseless.

Archaeology. A fallen empire, renowned for the magical prowess its wizards held at its height, has left ruins scattered about the land (perhaps the cities of the elves that once covered Ytarria?). Legend fills these ruins with great tomes of secrets far beyond what is known to the wizards of today, and with mighty magical treasures and weapons. Retrieving these treasures, what with traps, curses, mystical guardians and hidden tombs, will be hard enough, but that's just the beginning; deciphering the obscure magical texts and piecing together the techniques and mysteries the old empire understood could take lifetimes, if it's possible at all.

Cold War. As an extension of the Espionage campaign, the politics, warfare and diplomacy of a whole *world* can be defined by a race between two groups or nations to develop the most complex and powerful magic. Yrth is already something like this, with magical competition between Megalos and Al-Wazif having led to the Mages' War of the 1920s. Imagining a 60-year deadlock between the nations, with Megalan and Wazifi wizards stationed in client states like Caithness and Cardiel "for their protection" and the possible effects of an all-out magical war hanging in everyone's minds, is a small step.

Luddites. A guild researching Making and Breaking magic has recently developed Fifth Movement spells in that College, learning the Repair and Sharpen spells and earning a lucrative Imperial Legion contract to supply armorers who work faster and require less equipment than the cumbersome smiths they previously used. The powerful Armorer's Guild, more than a little upset at losing the contract, are the obvious suspects when petty thugs start to make trouble for the wizards, harassing them, depriving them sleep and damaging one of their labs. So far, they've stopped short of attempted assassination, but it's only a matter of time, and the thugs are proving difficult for the Legionnaire PCs to track down...

Transhuman Magic. Many of the ideas behind the **Transhuman Space** RPG can apply just as well to magic as to science. Advanced Body Control and Animal magic can alter the human form, while higher Healing magic apparently does away with age and death. Meanwhile, golems, zombies and elementals do our menial work, and the spirits of the dead remain among us in incorporeal form, testing the limits and definitions of humanity. Applying the philosophy of transhumanism, and the social theories behind it, to a setting driven by magical research and competition can create a very different and challenging fantasy setting, tearing away traditional high-fantasy archetypes of light and dark and making the PCs and their contemporaries responsible for their powers and for the ramifications of their use.

Magical Research

Researching spells and techniques in higher Movements, or bringing the knowledge of a higher-Movement culture or group to a less-enlightened one, works like inventing and introducing new gadgets and devices. See *Building Up Local Technology* and *New Inventions*, both p.B186, substituting Movements for Tech Levels and Thaumatology skill (or appropriate specialization; see below) for Engineering. Successful invention rolls allow the wizard to research a spell the wizard does not yet know, provided he knows the prerequisites for it. The GM may assign penalties for learning a spell that's normally unavailable at his Movement (such as a Third Movement mage researching Simple Illusion), or bonuses for simply relearning a known spell at a higher Movement (learning Fascinate/Mvt4, which can be cast without a ritual by a sufficiently skilled wizard, when the wizard already knows Fascinate/Mvt3).

The new spell is then learned by the researcher as normal, and can be taught to other wizards or recorded in a grimoire. It can also be taught to a student, although if not at the required Movement himself the student must pay double the character point cost to learn it and cannot use it as a prerequisite for other spells until his Movement has been raised by tutoring. The GM may judge a spellcaster who has researched a number of spells at a higher Movement to have climbed to the new Movement, and make him buy the appropriate advantage. As with technology, the GM may refuse a PC trying to research spells for a Movement he wishes to keep out of PC hands.

Magic as Gadgeteering

Alternatively, in a very "high-fantasy" setting, the GM may allow a variant of the Gadgeteering advantage (see below) to be used for quickly developing spells. Use the rules on p.CI121; most spells are Average complexity, while Magery 1 spells are Complex and Magery 2 or 3 spells are Amazing. Expenses (occult ingredients and lab supplies) are divided by 1000; however, the wizard must pay an equal amount of *fatigue* (this can come from Powerstones) through magical experimentation, trial and error and so on. Once devised, the new spell can be learned and taught as above.

"Quick" Gadgeteering allows rapid improvised spells. In place of the "Required Materials" roll, the wizard quickly produces a ritual, with inscriptions, sympathetic props, and occult paraphernalia, to aid in spell-casting. This should be an Artist, Bard, or Craft roll as appropriate to the ritual. The spell thus improvised can only be used for the day, the premise having slipped from the wizard's mind by the next morning.

Note that magical Gadgeteering is distinct from Natural Spellcasting (p.CI41), which is only usable under stress. The Gadgeteering advantage may not be suitable for every game, and the GM may wish to disallow it.

Advantages, Disadvantages, and Skills

A list of new traits, and amendments to existing ones, follows.

Higher Magic

Varies

As a native of an enlightened nation or member of an accomplished guild, or being an inspired wizard yourself, you know magic that is significantly more complex than the campaign standard. This is the direct equivalent of the High Technology advantage (p.CI26), substituting Movements for Tech Levels, and costs the same.

Gadgeteer (Spell Research)

25 or 50 points

See p.CI25. In a cinematic "high-fantasy" game, the Gadgeteer advantage can be applied to spells instead of gadgets, allowing for a creative wizard who quickly devises new spells and techniques. See *Magic as Gadgeteering*, above.

Unenlightened

-5 points per level

Coming from a simple provincial magic discipline, or from a low-mana area where magic is less studied, you have a poorer understanding of magic. This is the direct equivalent of the Primitive disadvantage (p.B26), substituting Movements for Tech Levels, and has the same value. Note that, except in High Mana worlds, this disadvantage is only available to characters with Magical Aptitude, and only two levels can be taken, since it is always better to be able to cast spells - even crude ones -- than not.

Movement-dependent Skills

In a campaign that uses Movements, some skills and all spells become *Movement-dependent*. This is the direct equivalent of technology-dependent skills (see p.B42), and should be designated by /Mvt. For instance, the Flame Jet/Mvt3 spell is very different from the Flame Jet/Mvt5 spell. When using a Movement-dependent skill for a task from a different Movement, such as using Thaumatology/Mvt3 (Earth) when analyzing a victim of the Fourth Movement Flesh to Stone spell, penalties apply as per p.B185. Alchemy, Herbary and Thaumatology are Movement-dependent, as are Rune-Lore and the individual rune skills. Spell "finesse" skills such as Spell-Throwing, Magic Breath, and Illusion Art are not. At the GM's discretion, some sciences may be /Mvt skills; see *Sciences as Magical Skills*, below.

Alchemy/Mvt (Mental/Very Hard)* and *Herbary/Mvt (Mental/Very Hard)

See p.CI148 and p.CI150. In a campaign that uses Movement rules, these are /Mvt skills. Herbary is available in the first and second Movements, and Alchemy is available from the third Movement onwards.

Thaumatology/Mvt (Mental/Hard)

Defaults to IQ-5

In a campaign that uses Movements, this skill drops from Very Hard to Hard, and becomes Movement-dependent (see above) and specialized. At First or Second Movement, a thaumatologist *may* specialize (see p.B43) in one of the following areas of influence:

- Animals and Plants
- Body and Movement
- Fire and Light
- Food and Water
- Mind (Only at Second Movement)

At Third or later Movements, a thaumatologist *must* specialize (see p.B43) in a particular College. The skill may be purchased more than once, and specializations default to one another at -3. Magical Aptitude bonuses still apply to all specializations of the skill.

The Sixth Movement?

The scheme above assumes a culture that is technologically relatively crude, and which advances little over time as magic fills most of the peoples' needs. The Tech College has been deliberately left out to reflect this. This isn't, however, necessarily the case; fiction and gaming alike offer a range of contemporary, near-future and super-tech settings incorporating magic. When considering the type and sophistication of magic in the campaign, the GM should give some thought to the evolution of technology in parallel with it. There are three default assumptions to choose from, with some variation within each:

Magic leads Technology. In most fantasy settings, magical power has always been available, but is not available to everyone (ie. a Normal Mana level). In these worlds, technology will develop slowly as an alternative to magic, empowering those without the gift and sparing mages' time and fatigue. In these settings magical research often inspire mundane knowledge rather than vice versa: smelting iron and steel comes about once Elemental wizards better understand the Earth College and the nature of metal, and Healing mages lead the way in anatomy and herbalism, eager to find nonmagical alternatives to their spells. See *Sciences as Magical Skills*, below. Technology is seen as an offshoot of magical research; the Machine Sub-College develops late, if at all, as using spells to control devices which

only exist to supplement spells is considered redundant. Obscure sciences like higher physics may never leave the realm of thaumatology; the Energy and Radiation Sub-Colleges, available from the Fourth Movement, depend on and enable magical experimentation.

Technology leads Magic. In many contemporary settings, an already technologically-developed world suddenly gains access to magic. FASA's ***Shadowrun*** is based on this premise, as is ***GURPS Technomancer***. Magic progresses rapidly, achieving the Third Movement within a handful of years. The conceptual background for higher-Movement innovations like Colleges has already been established by nonmagical thinkers, such as philosophers and early Natural Historians. The Tech College arises as an early priority; machines are in everyone's lives, and magic that relates to them is a valuable tool. The principles underlying magical research remain grounded in scientific method, and skills like Alchemy and Thaumatology employ modern equipment and techniques. The race for Fourth and Fifth Movement magic begins in earnest as soon as the dust settles, driven by generations of technological competition.

Magic Supplants Technology. In High-Mana settings where spells are available to everyone, there is little call to develop technology at all. Education is a priority from early days, to ensure that young workers and craftsmen are effective spellcasters, and the rare individuals (generally those with Magic Resistance) who are unable to cast spells are viewed with pity or superstition. In such settings, technology is unlikely to arise at all; swords and guns are useless to soldiers equipped with fireballs, and tools are needless once the Making and Breaking College is known. Supplanting spells with nonmagical tools may even be taboo. Margaret Weiss and Tracy Hickman's *Darksword* trilogy describes a world along these lines, where nonmagical babies are exposed at birth and mages skilled in the Draw Power and Lend ST spells dominate a mana-based economy. The Machine Sub-College is entirely needless in such a setting, although the Energy and Metal Sub-Colleges arise in the fourth Movement. Radiation and Plastic spells may develop in the fifth Movement at the GM's discretion, from magical research into unusual energies and materials.

Sciences as Magical Skills

In magical worlds, scientific study is often driven by magical research, rather than technology. Healers use their spells to further the study of medicine and anatomy while masters of Making and Breaking magic develop metallurgy and the crafts. Elementalists pursue the study of chemistry, while students of Light and Darkness, Movement, Sound and Radiation are consummate physicists. At the GM's option, some or all sciences in a highly magical world should be Movement-dependent rather than technological. Physician/Mvt4, for instance, encompasses the knowledge of diseases and injuries enabled by the explosion of healing spells that arise in the fourth Movement.

Buzzkill

Drug Development and Side Effects for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Matt Riggsby

Between the rule-of-thumb guidelines for ultra-tech drugs (p. B425) and the rules on new inventions (p. B473), it's quite possible for characters in science-fiction settings (cyberpunkish settings are particularly appropriate) to develop their own miracle drugs. And super-drugs needn't be limited to high-tech settings; consider the injection that produced the Invisible Man, the potion that turned Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde, the super-serum that created Captain America, and the Miraclo pill that gives Hourman his powers. Better living through gadgeteering!

But in the rules given, bugs for near-miss successes are fairly vague and relatively easily fixed, whereas in real drug development, few if any drugs are free of side effects and interactions that might be regarded as bugs. Just about every medication comes with a list of warnings about who should not take it (pregnant or nursing women, people taking MAO inhibitors, people with allergies to penicillin, etc.) and possible side effects (headaches, nausea, etc.). Such problems are likely to persist into the future; even Captain Kirk had drug allergies. And since there are guidelines for inventing alchemical potions (p. M212), fantasy has its own kind of pharmaceutical research.

The tables below allow the GM to quickly come up with potential side effects to newly developed drugs, or to add color to existing drugs in high-tech campaigns. For each bug that the initial design creates, roll on the side effects table below, then apply limitations to those side effects as desired.

Side Effects

For each side effect, roll three dice and consult the table below. Read each die individually rather than totaling them; for example, a roll of 3-6-6 would mean a minor respiratory problem. Where no game effect is given, treat as the disadvantage of the same name.

Effects marked with a * are insignificant enough that they can be regarded as minor bugs; more serious effects may or may not be regarded as minor depending on other circumstances. Causing severe chest pains is a big problem if a drug has that effect on everyone who has it; if only 1% of people who take it get those pains, it's not such a problem.

Effects marked with a ! are *permanent*. They inflict a permanent, but possibly treatable, disadvantage on the subject.

Effects marked with a + are supernatural or metaphysical in nature. They're appropriate for alchemical and perhaps super-powered potions, but in high-tech campaigns, the GM may wish to reroll.

Roll	Description	Game Effect
1 to 3 1 1	Addictive	
1 to 3 1 2	Berserk	
1 to 3 1 3	Bestial +	
1 to 3 1 4	Blood thinning	Treat as Hemophilia
1 to 3 1 5	Blurred vision	Treat as Bad Sight; possibly correctable with eye drops
1 to 3 1 6	Carcinogen!	User acquires the Terminally Ill disadvantage. Both Prevalence and Habitual Use limitations should be applied automatically.
1 to 3 2 1	Chronic Depression	
1 to 3 2 2	Cursed +	
1 to 3 2 3	Disorientation	Treat as Confused

1 to 3	2	4	Disturbing Voice +	
1 to 3	2	5	Dizziness	-3 to DX and -1 to IQ
1 to 3	2	6	Dry mouth*	Treat as Gluttony, but limited to liquids
1 to 3	3	1	Extreme general soreness	Treat as Chronic Pain (Agonizing)
1 to 3	3	2	Fatigue *	Treat as Drowsy (p. B428)
1 to 3	3	3	Frightens Animals +	
1 to 3	3	4	General malaise: a combination of mild depression and physical discomfort resulting in an inability to enjoy anything.	Treat as Killjoy
1 to 3	3	5	General soreness	Treat as Chronic Pain (Mild)
1 to 3	3	6	Generalized mild discomfort *	Nausea, headache, itching. Distracting, but not critical. -1 to IQ for tasks requiring long-term concentration
1 to 3	4	1	Hair loss	Patchy hair loss reduces appearance by one level if the user isn't already bald. The effect is impermanent in that hair will grow back, but otherwise this effect is not subject to duration modifiers
1 to 3	4	2	Highly Addictive	
1 to 3	4	3	Hunger *	Treat as Gluttony
1 to 3	4	4	Impaired judgment	Treat as Impulsiveness
1 to 3	4	5	Indecisive	
1 to 3	4	6	Insomnia*	Treat as Insomniac; the effect lasts at least until the next time the character tries to sleep, regardless of its nominal duration.
1 to 3	5	1	Irritability*	Treat as Bad Temper
1 to 3	5	2	Lethal allergic reaction	Treat as a Heart Attack (p. B429), although the specific treatment needed will be different
1 to 3	5	3	Long-term organ damage !	Subject gains a level of Short Life Span
1 to 3	5	4	Loss of appetite *	
1 to 3	5	5	Lunacy +	
1 to 3	5	6	Magic Susceptibility +	
1 to 3	6	1	Manic-depressive	
1 to 3	6	2	Mildly impaired hearing (ringing in ears or other ear problems) *	-2 to Hearing rolls
1 to 3	6	3	Mildly impaired scent/taste *	-2 to Scent and Taste rolls
1 to 3	6	4	Mildly impaired touch (for example, numbness and tingling in extremities) *	-2 to Touch rolls
1 to 3	6	5	Mildly impaired vision (for example, mild blurring or extreme dryness)	-2 to Vision rolls
1 to 3	6	6	Minor respiratory problem *	Coughing, sneezing, or runny nose. 2 per minute for attempts to remain inaudible.
4 to 6	1	1	Minor systemic	The user suffers generalized damage to internal

damage

systems, taking 1d3 damage. This effect is impermanent in that it maybe healed normally, but is otherwise not subject to duration modifiers

4 to 6	1	2	Motion sickness *	
4 to 6	1	3	Neurological disorder (Crippling)	
4 to 6	1	4	Neurological disorder (Mild)	
4 to 6	1	5	Neurological disorder (Severe)	
4 to 6	1	6	Night blindness *	Triple darkness penalties
4 to 6	2	1	Nightmares	Like insomnia, this will apply at least the next time the character tries to sleep, regardless of nominal duration.
4 to 6	2	2	Numb	
4 to 6	2	3	Obsession+	
4 to 6	2	4	Organ damage !	Subject loses 1d3 HT permanently.
4 to 6	2	5	Panic	Subject suffers panic reactions; any moderately stressful situation requires a Fright Check
4 to 6	2	6	Paranoia	
4 to 6	3	1	Phantom Voices +	
4 to 6	3	2	Rebound	Subject suffers an "opposite" effect once the drug wears off. For example, a DX-increasing drug temporarily inflicts DX loss, a night-vision-inducing drug inflicts night blindness.
4 to 6	3	3	Seizures	Treat as Epilepsy
4 to 6	3	4	Sensitive digestion *	Treat as Restricted Diet for at least one day, regardless of nominal duration.
4 to 6	3	5	Sensitivity to light *	-2 to Vision and to-hit rolls in light which poses a penalty of 2 or less.
4 to 6	3	6	Sensitivity to pain	Overall tenderness or generalized pain increasing sensitivity to further pain. Treat as Low Pain Threshold.
4 to 6	4	1	Severe general soreness	Treat as Chronic Pain (Severe)
4 to 6	4	2	Severe nausea	Treat as Nauseated (p. 428)
4 to 6	4	3	Sexual side effects *	Subject temporarily loses interest in sex or ability to perform. Treat as Eunuch, although capability to reproduce has not necessarily been lost.
4 to 6	4	4	Short Attention Span	
4 to 6	4	5	Sleep disturbances *	Light sleeper
4 to 6	4	6	Sleepwalker+	
4 to 6	5	1	Slow Healing *	
4 to 6	5	2	Small muscular tremors	Treat as Ham-fisted
4 to 6	5	3	Sterility	Subject cannot reproduce
4 to 6	5	4	Supernatural Feature +	
4 to 6	5	5	Suppressed immune system	The subject is more susceptible to infections. 2 to HT to resist disease for at least 1d3 days regardless of nominal duration.
4 to 6	5	6	Tolerance: the user gradually builds up a resistance to the drug	Roll 3d6 to determine a tolerance modifier. Every time the drug is taken, roll against HT + the tolerance modifier - total cumulative number of doses taken. If the HT roll fails, subsequent doses of the drug will have no effect on the user. Duration and habitual use

4 to 6	6	1	Totally Addictive	modifiers do not apply to this effect.
4 to 6	6	2	Treatable damage: Subject is afflicted with a permanent but treatable disorder (for example, diabetes or hypothyroidism).	Treat as a monthly Dependency on medication required to treat the disorder. Realistically, the character will probably take small, daily doses of a drug rather than one monthly dose; not taking it for a long term will start to cause damage.
4 to 6	6	3	Uncertain effect	The user must <i>fail</i> a HT roll for the drug to take effect. Do not roll duration modifiers
4 to 6	6	4	Unluckiness+	
4 to 6	6	5	Visible effect	Dilated or closed pupils, peculiar skin coloration, profuse sweating, speech impediment (slurring, stuttering). 1 to reaction modifiers
4 to 6	6	6	Weirdness Magnet +	

Modifiers

What makes side effects hard to fix is how long it takes them to appear. If the high-tech drug providing improved night vision, which you're formulating for the military, causes splitting headaches every time it is used, you can spot that quickly in testing and go back to the drawing board. However, it's quite possibly the case that those headaches will only develop in a few susceptible individuals, only after prolonged use, or only when taken together with the KombatQuik drug that someone else is developing.

For each side effect, roll a die. If the first die rolled in the side effects table above is a 2 or a 4, roll an additional die. If the first roll is a 3 or a 6, roll two additional dice. Again, each die is read separately. Apply the corresponding modifiers, ignoring duplicates. For example, for that 3-4-2 roll in the first example, the GM would roll three dice (one, plus two more for rolling a 3 on the initial side effect die roll). If they came up 3-3-5, the GM would apply a prevalence modifier; the second 3 is ignored and the 5 indicates no modifier.

- 1 Interaction
- 2 Prevalence
- 3 Duration
- 4 Habitual use
- 5-6 None

Interaction

If a side effect has an interaction modifier, the effect only manifests when the drug is taken within a day of another drug or chemical. The GM will have to select the drug with which it interacts as appropriate to the campaign, but 1d6 can be used to determine how common that drug is:

- 1-**Very common:** Inexpensive, easily obtained, and frequently used chemicals such as aspirin, caffeine, alcohol.
- 3
- 4-**Common:** Somewhat more expensive but still fairly frequently used drugs, such as antidepressants, penicillin,
- 5 prescription pain killers, birth control medication, advantage or attribute-granting drugs costing \$500 or less
- 6 **Rare:** Most drugs to treat specific conditions (for example, glaucoma or cancer), advantage or attribute-granting drugs costing \$500 and up

But I'm Allergic to Bat's Wings!

When it comes to inventing alchemical elixirs, the GM may be excused for bypassing the side effects table and coming up with picturesque effects appropriate to the potion's effect. For example, an animal control potion might cause the user to grow whiskers and a cold, wet nose, while a potion protecting the user from fire might cause him to grow icicles hanging from his nose, ears, and chin.

Prevalence

Many side effects happen to some people but not to others. Roll two dice to see how common the side effect is.

Roll	Prevalence (approximate)	Prevalence roll
1-2	1-2 1 in 2	11
1-2	3-4 1 in 4	13
1-2	5-6 1 in 10	15
3-4	1-2 1 in 20	16
3-4	3-4 1 in 50	17
3-4	5-6 1 in 100	17/11
5-6	1-2 1 in 200	18
5-6	3-4 1 in 1000	18/14
5-6	5-6 1 in 10,000	18/17

The first time a character takes a drug where the side effect has a prevalence modifier, the user should attempt to roll under the number indicated in the prevalence roll column. If there are two numbers, roll against the second one if the first roll fails. If the character fails the roll, the side effect will manifest every time he takes the drug. (Note that HT scores don't enter into it. If you have a reaction to a drug, it's more likely a consequence of your body chemistry than your overall health.)

Duration

Typically, a side effect last as long as the drug itself (+/- 10%, at the GM's discretion). However, it may be a short-term effect, or it may persist even longer. Roll 3d6.

3-5	One quarter as long
6-9	Half as long
10-11	2× duration
12-13	3× duration
14-15	4× duration
16	8× duration
17	10× duration
18	Permanent

Habitual use

Some side effects only manifest after prolonged use. Roll 3d6-3 to obtain a modifier. Every time the drug is taken, roll against HT + the modifier total cumulative number of doses taken in the past (drug's duration * 100). Once the user fails the HT roll, he will suffer the side effect with every dose of the drug unless he stops taking it for the drug's duration * 100.

Other Considerations

One possible objection to applying the invention rules to drug development is that the development times involved are orders of magnitude too short. Development cycles for new drugs is measured in years and decades, not days and weeks. Certainly, the state of the art at TL9 may be far, far beyond what it is now, but the GM may still feel uncomfortable letting PCs come up with infallible cancer cures and super-strength pills in their kitchens. Therefore, some guidelines might be applied:

Remember that the table associating finished product costs on p. B473 is a *suggestion*, not a comprehensive rule. Any new drug might be regarded as at least a Complex invention, regardless of the finished cost, and require a minimum skill level of 18+.

Required times could easily be increased by very large amounts. For example, days might be treated as weeks, weeks as months, and months as years, with appropriate adjustments to related costs.

The chemical operations that ultra-tech drugs try to perform may be so complex that someone, somewhere will have an adverse side effect. The GM may rule that, even on a critical success on the design roll, 1d3 minor bugs exist, and at least one major bug on any non-critical success.

The less common the side effect, the harder it will be to find. If a testing attempt indicates that a bug has been found, pick the undiscovered side effect with the fewest modifiers. In order to actually discover the bug, make the following rolls:

- **Interaction:** Roll a 10 or less on 3d6 for an interaction with a Very Common drug, an 8 or less for a Common drug, or a 6 or less for a Rare drug.
- **Prevalence:** Make the same rolls as necessary to fall subject to the effect, but at +1 to each roll for each round of testing the drug has been through previously to a maximum of +5. For example, if a side effect effects 1 in 200 people, it would be detected on an 18 on the first round of testing, 17 or 18 on the second round, 16+ on the third, and so on until it would be detected on a 13+ on the sixth and each subsequent round of testing.
- **Habitual Use:** Roll greater than the habitual use modifier.

If a side effect has multiple modifiers, *all* of the rolls must be made. Consequently, it would take a lot of testing to turn up a side effect afflicting 2% of users after extended use in conjunction with aspirin or heavy drinking. Indeed, a drug could be tested for a very, very long time without finding all of the potential side effects. And even if they were found, going back to the drawing board to fix all of a drug's side effects may be a very expensive and time-consuming proposition.

But that doesn't have to be a show-stopper for characters who want to become pharmaceutical manufacturers. As already observed, any number of drugs widely available today have well-known side effects: antihistamines make you drowsy, allergies to aspirin and penicillin are not uncommon, and so on. They're not perfect, but they do their jobs well enough that they're used anyway. Any major bug is likely to keep a drug off the open market in a well-controlled society, but it might still circulate on the black market, or at least be sold with multiple warning labels about the potential dangers and be used only in extremity. Even significant minor bugs might keep a drug from being commercially viable. In a more chaotic or ruthlessly competitive setting, though, such as most cyberpunk campaigns, it'd be quite easy for powerful drugs with dangerous side effects to reach the open market.

This You Must Never Do, My Child

Superstition in Unknown Armies

by Loki Carbis

Superstition is a part of human culture that appears impossible to eradicate. No matter how far we move on from the silly or strange beliefs of our ancestors, there's always a grandmother out there spreading the virus of superstition to the next generation. Somehow, that collection of sayings, actions and beliefs always gets passed along. But at least we can take some comfort: superstitions may once have had some significance, but they don't anymore.

Or do they? After all, the Dipsomancy spell 'God Looks Out For Drunks' and the Urbanomancy spell 'Break Your Mother's Back,' to name but two, are both named for superstitions, and presumably for good reason.

The reason is this: superstition is not powerless. Not entirely. In fact, superstitions are like extremely minor formula rituals known to everyone. Not many people believe in them consciously, but nearly everyone has a few locked away in the depths of their mind, usually some minor and pointless taboo they picked up in childhood and haven't thought about since. It doesn't give them much juice -- there's no recorded instance of a superstition generating an effect greater than that of a single minor charge, and most are far smaller in power -- but that's still more than a lot of people have. Enough to make it worth your while, if you've nothing else you can use, or you're really desperate. Or both.

It works like this:

1. A person who is superstitious violates a superstition in some way -- they break a mirror, step on a crack, whatever. Alternately, a complete skeptic can do it, if they are surrounded by at least five people who do believe in that superstition.
2. The Adept notices this, and within no more than a few minutes, performs a small ritual featuring some physical connection to the event -- a piece of the broken mirror, or at the site of the particular crack that was stepped on. The normal rules for rituals apply -- a Soul check at -30 is necessary to cast the ritual successfully.
3. The Adept must not have broken the taboo of that particular superstition for at least a week beforehand -- the longer the better, although one would have to go a year or more without breaking taboo to gain any bonus to the ritual. Likewise, if they break taboo within an hour of the casting, the effects hit them instead.
4. The effect is a more limited version of whatever the superstition specifies -- a broken mirror might be good for seven hours bad luck rather than seven years, stepping on a crack might give your mother a sore back that night. GMs should be very careful to ensure that effects are correspondingly small when superstition is used.

There is a way to achieve greater than normal potency in a superstition ritual, which is to harness the Unnatural. Unnatural energies cause various side effects as they radiate out from Adepts, artifacts, and Unnatural beings, but a skilled superstition adept can channel this energy into their magick, increasing its power. There are only three small problems to doing this: it's dangerously unstable, increasing the risk of backfires; it tends to tick off the Adept or Unnatural Being in question; and finally, it's really dangerously unstable. The trade off is that the roll to cast the spell is easier -- a straight Soul check -- but any failure of the roll generates a sour cherry.

Even used normally, there are several notable drawbacks to using superstition, including:

- You might as well just tattoo "I'm a clueless wannabe" on your face if you plan to use it in front of (let alone against) a real Adept.
- The power restrictions mentioned above.
- Anyone can use it. Literally anyone. And they need not even know that they're doing it. A school kid walking behind a bully in his class could see the bully step on a crack, and wish aloud that it does actually break the bully's mother's back as he crosses the same crack, and that would be enough to at least give her a back ache (assuming all other preconditions were met, of course). This makes it both hard to keep secret and decidedly

unfashionable among the occult underground.

- You pretty much have to be there to see the superstition's taboo violated, which means that your target is likely to see you trying your ritual.
- You can't actually use it to do anything that would violate the laws of physics -- anything you can do with it is going to look like a coincidence to a skeptical observer. At most.

On the other hand, it's a good low access sort of power for harassing people, it doesn't use up charges, it takes virtually zero preparation or knowledge on the part of caster, and you can use it regardless of whether or not you know any other magick, even if you're a member of a school. Unsurprisingly, a lot of the clueless folks who form the occult mainstream tend to be among the most frequent users of superstition. Some of them are even doing it knowingly.

Superstitions for Bad Luck

- Having a black cat or a snake cross one's path. (Snakes in particular symbolize treachery, cats general ill fortune)
- Breaking a mirror (this is supposed to be good for seven years bad luck)
- Walking under a ladder
- Seeing an owl during daylight hours
- Spilling salt
- Killing a sparrow accidentally (to do so on purpose is doubly bad luck)
- The number 13 in almost any context
- Friday is the unluckiest day of the week -- it is especially bad to start a journey on a Friday
- Logically following from the last two items, Friday the Thirteenth of any month is a bad day
- Working on a Saturday -- particularly if it's the first day of a new job -- is bad luck, usually leading to losing the job in short order
- Eat an apple on Christmas Eve for good health the next year
- The superstition of knocking on wood for good luck originates from pagan beliefs in regards to trees
- A bat flying into a house is a sign of death. A bird flying into the house is a sign of important news -- which is usually death if it cannot fly out again.
- Crows are birds of ill-omen
- Placing a hat on a bed
- Opening an umbrella indoors
- If a bird flies towards you, bad fortune is imminent
- Entering your new residence for the first time via the back door
- Blinds falling down without anyone touching them
- Buying a broom in the month of May
- Stepping on a crack on the sidewalk breaks your mother's back

Superstitions for Good Luck

- A found horseshoe, nailed to a door or wall with the open end upwards will generate good luck
- Carrying either a four leafed clover (that you have found yourself) or a rabbit's foot will bring good luck, as will a peacock's feather, or a penny placed in one's shoe
- When two people pull apart the wishbone of a turkey or chicken, whoever winds up with the longer end will have a wish granted.
- There are many superstitions which must be followed at weddings to avoid bad luck such as the wearing of 'something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue' and the carrying of the bride over the threshold (to prevent her from tripping, which brings bad luck).
- The numbers 7 and 12 are often thought to be lucky
- Monday is sometimes considered a lucky day, especially for starting new things.
- Finding a spider on one's person (or in one's clothes) is good luck, usually to do with money.

Ambivalent Superstitions

- If the flame of a candle flickers and then turns blue, there's a spirit in the room
- A chill up your spine means that someone is walking on your future grave
- A person born on Halloween will have the gift of communicating with the dead
- If your palm itches, you will soon receive money; but if you scratch the itch, the money will never come

Mundane Karma

That being said, there is one form of superstition which looks like it might possibly make the jump to being a full school in the not too distant future. At the current time, it's still possible to use it in tandem with those schools whose taboos align reasonably well with it. This proto-school is known to those who use it as Mundane Karma.

Mundane Karma takes the general idea of being nice to other people out of enlightened self-interest, and raises it to the Nth degree. A practitioner of Mundane Karma (the proto-school is so new and so little-known that its adepts have no widely known nickname yet in the occult underground -- although some refer to themselves as Karma Mechanics) specifically sets out to do good deeds for a not-very deferred personal gain.

A Minor Charge can be generated by simply doing a helpful thing at a time when it makes no particular difference to you. A Significant charge requires the adept to be helpful when it's actually to their own disadvantage to do so. The actual deeds are pretty minor -- examples include:

- Letting someone ahead of you in a queue.
- Not bothering to pick up dropped loose change (and thus ensuring that someone else could)
- Holding a door open for someone.

It takes five individual occasions of performing whichever act to generate a charge; walking along the street and slowly dribbling coinage from your hand generates one fifth of a charge, no matter how many individual coins you drop -- it has to be a separate instance. Careful records should be kept: each individual act is recorded separately, much like for Personomancers. It's possible to have excellent door opening karma and crappy queue karma, or vice versa. Minor and significant charges are recorded separately, and do not stack.

If the player prefers to avoid that much bookkeeping, they can simply stipulate how many charges they are likely to generate over a given period of time -- a day or a week are the best choices for this. Subject to modification by the GM, they can then assume that they have that many charges to spend over the same period of time.

Mundane Karma charges can only be spent when the opportunity arises. You can't spend a charge to get someone to open a door if you don't plan to use it as soon as they do, and so on. A Minor Charge will cause, basically, the effect generated to gain that charge -- someone will do something to help you if it doesn't inconvenience them to do so. A Significant charge will cause them to do so when it does inconvenience them. Alternately, a Significant charge can be used to cause a helpful act from someone who will not be inconvenienced -- the usual Minor charge result, but in addition, it will cause it to occur in such a way as to disadvantage a person you nominate (who can not the person whose action helps you) to be inconvenienced -- a door might be held open just long enough for you to get through, then let go of in time for it to swing into the face of someone pursuing you.

Mundane Karma has no formula spells, and no Blast. It's possible that these may yet be invented by enterprising Mundane Karma adepts, but none exist at the following time. There is also, at this point in the school's development, no such thing as a Major effect or charge in the school. Several examples have been theorized, but no one has yet succeeded in making any of them work. In some cases, this is due to the difficulty of applying this concept at such a scale, but in others, it's because no one wants to try and fail. The most popular theory currently proposes that an act of kindness that costs the life of the Mundane Karma adept who performs it would generate a Major charge, although how exactly the adept is supposed to spend the charge is a question with no satisfactory answer.

Pyramid Review

The Lostfinder's Guide to Mire End (for a|state)

Published by [Contested Ground Studios](#)

Written by Malcolm Craig with Colin Chapman, Ed Handley, & John Wilson

Illustrated by Paul Bourne

Cartography by Gregor Hutton

32-page b&w softcover; \$10

The Lostfinder's Guide to Mire End is the first supplement for *a|state*, the Scottish RPG of Dickensian Science Fiction that encrusts the Steampunk genre in a thick and grim griminess. It focuses upon the one neighborhood of The City, Mire End, a destitute little burgh bordering the richer, better governed Three Canals Metropolitan Area. Within its few pages can be found an overview of the area, as well as descriptions of the various locations, persons, and organizations of note, all supported by a plethora of adventure hooks.

The supplement is a slim affair, just 32 pages long; although it follows the same layout as the core rulebook, this book is much better looking. This is because the ratio of art to text is much higher, and the artwork itself, again done on computer by Paul Bourne, is also better. It does not have the stretched look found in the rulebook, nor is it as clean, having a grimmer quality very befitting Mire End's dinginess. Best of all though, is the single page of cartography, which while in black and white, appearing to have been done in ink and water colors. It is nicely detailed and one more element that adds to the book's atmosphere.

It is described as being a "Lostfinder's Guide," a Lostfinder being a an individual who undertakes small jobs for the community, finding lost people and dogs being common tasks. In the case of Mire End, the Lostfinder is Janus Kripitsch, who although not described or detailed here, is quoted on several occasions. Mire End is itself the default setting for the game, the publisher supporting it with several issues of the Mire End Tribute via their website. Indeed, one of the area's locations, Shale Hall, is expanded upon in several of these downloads.

Mire End is a grotty, sodden area, the inhabitants forced to fend for themselves in obtaining both clean water and a regular supply of electricity. It is dominated criminally by the Hohler Gang, which retains it position by squashing any potential rival. Employment is generally found elsewhere, though there is fierce competition for positions at the Mire End Cog Works, the only source of fair, local employment. The history of Mire End is dominated by several events over the last 150 years. They begin with the "Shake," a localized tremor that shattered the local sewer system and left its streets ankle deep in fetid water, followed by the neighborhood's rejected petition to join the Three Canals Metropolitan Area. Its economic fortunes collapsed with the closure of the railway line by The Ancient And Honourable Guild Of Fulgurators, while only three years ago hundreds died during the Arclight attack on the faked Hirplakker staging post during the Hundred Block War.

Despite the area's rundown nature, some of its citizens and organizations work to improve their lot. Disgraced Father Guy Herbert runs the Third Church Home for Unwanted Children, teaching its charges a useful trade; the *Mire End Tribune* runs literacy classes for all; and the Forest Green Regulars is a vigilante group that patrols its few blocks to keep it safe from the local gangs. Indeed, the continued publication of the publicly minded and crusading *Mire End*

Tribune has become a beloved institution to many, though others would prefer its presses smashed and the newspaper shut down.

Each location is presented in the same format that includes a simple description, and an associated NPC, adventure nugget, and organization. The NPCs and organizations are presented in similar fashion, with physical descriptions given for the former, and details of the status, headquarters, membership, and area of operation for the latter. There is some cross-referencing between these base details, helping to tie the contents together and increase its utility.

Besides the aforementioned *Mire End Tribune* and its staff, other interesting locations include Detseted's Pawn Shop where its owner monitors the extensive wares via a system of mirrors and prisms; the Old Bleach Factory, destroyed and flooded by the Shake, its toxic ruins still picked over by hopeful treasure hunters; and Redberry Park, part noxious rubbish dump, part red light district. Notable NPCs include the well-dressed and manicured Tobias Glym, the area's leading black marketeer; Cornelia Hessel, reclusive builder of dingins (*a|state's* equivalent of the computer) par excellence; and Carnelian Yet, the gifted political activist who will work for most causes. Only a few organizations are described, with the worst being Wastrel's Lot, the preteen militant wing of the Hohler gang, who gave them the huge cartridge pistols that they use to carry out the bloodiest of assignments.

Before finishing up with a list of NPCs typical to the area (the only ones in the book to be given any statistics), the GM receives seven adventure nuggets. Each is roughly half a page long, and comes with at least three explanations. They include the return of "Cutting Tom," the serial killer who was active a century before; someone manufacturing cogs and passing them off as coming from the Mire End Cog Works in "Engines of Despair"; and encounters with "The Winged Man," a roof-dwelling builder of hang gliders. Not all of the adventures are easy to use, in the main because the accompanying explanations are weak, but there is nothing to prevent a GM from creating his own.

The wait for *The Lostfinder's Guide to Mire End* has been several months, but it has been worth it. The supplement provides *a|state* with much needed support that narrows the broad sweep of the rulebook to focus on one area. That it is tied into material already available on the publisher's website only increases the book's usefulness. *The Lostfinder's Guide to Mire End* is well-done, providing a suitably dank -- though not dour -- starting point for a solid campaign.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Are You Phrazy?

Published by [Gotta Laff Games](#)

Created by Dave Rockenbaugh

200 color cards, rules for four to eight players; \$19.95

Any game is going to see a lot of table talk, but *Are You Phrazy?* from Gotta Laff Games has the chatter built right in. The object of the game is to have the lowest score when the last hand is played.

Cards come in red, yellow, and green. Green cards start a conversation, the yellow cards continue the conversation, and the red ones end it. Each card bears a phrase, born of pop culture, thematically suggestive of their place in the conversation. For example, the green cards that get things rolling are things like "Wassup?" and "How you doin'?" (The cards might be forgiven for slight duplications, like "What's up, Doc?") Yellow cards are a bit more generic, with sayings like "I've fallen and I can't get up" or "Isn't that special?" The red conversation stoppers include appropriate bits like "Talk to the Hand" and "Hasta la vista, baby!"

Each player starts with a hand of cards, and the rest are left as a draw pile. The dealer flips the top card over, and play begins. If this initial card is green, chatter is underway and you can play yellow or red cards on it. If it's not green, however, someone needs to play a conversation starter. If it's your turn and you haven't a green card to lay down, you must draw from the deck. If that card is green, you can play it; otherwise play passes to the next person until someone gets things started.

Once underway, conversations start and stop. Players take turns putting cards down. If a player ends a conversation with a red card, it takes a green card to get it going again; the only other card you can play is another red card that matches the catchphrase -- you could keep stacking up "Have a nice day" cards one atop the other if you have them, and this is part of the twist. Other people can "butt in" on the conversation.

If you have a card with a phrase that matches whatever was last played, you can butt in. This allows you to get cards out of your hand when it isn't your turn. Anyone can match the phrase, and it's not unusual for multiple people to have the same phrase in their hand (and just one person might have multiple copies in their hand). If you can unload the match before the next person takes their regular turn, you'll be that much closer to emptying your hand. Even if it's your turn, you can match the previous player's phrase card before playing an unmatched card.

Finally, you have to say every card as you play it. If you don't utter "I'd like to buy a vowel" when you pull that card out (or more likely throw it out), you have to take that card back and forfeit your turn. When someone empties their hand, points are tallied for that round. You get points for the yellow cards, and even more for the reds and greens, so while a green card is useful and easy to play, you can't afford to keep it all game. Obviously whoever wins a hand has no cards and scores zero, and whoever has the lowest score when someone reaches 100 points wins the whole contest.

Physically the components are a bit of a disappointment. The cards feel mushy, like they're one grade of stock too low, but ironically they feel like iron when it comes time to shuffle them. To add some insult to injury, you have to shuffle them a lot (strange, considering you don't really draw a great many cards during a round), and butting in means you have to shuffle pretty thoroughly lest all those duplicate cards you stacked together don't get separated. Finally, the cards use a thick, blocky style that makes reading the phrases harder -- not as much of a problem before the round is going when you can read your hand at your leisure, but speed is of the essence when grabbing a card from your hand in response; when playing a newly drawn card; and when seeing what others are laying down.

As for play of the game, it all runs hot and cold. It's a pretty straightforward idea, but even after a few rounds you may be struggling to recall which cards can be played when. Replay value seems low, at least among those who want a game where they can employ clever new strategies or sharpen old ones, but that simplicity may appeal to groups with mixed age and skill levels. The social element can't be ignored, either, and having everyone shouting out their phrases as they try to get cards out of their hands is going to keep players laughing loud and hard. (Whattya know? You *do* have to laugh.) Then again, eight people throwing cards at once may mean a little too much chaos.

Are You Phrazy? is a good first release for Gotta Laff Games (other versions are promised, including TV and movies), and while it doesn't show much sophistication it does know the value of putting the interaction and fun ahead of a heavy set of rules.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

A Game of Thrones Board Game

Developed by Christian T. Petersen

Board Game Boxed Set; \$49.95

While fans of George R.R. Martin wait for the next book in the Song of Ice and Fire series, Fantasy Flight Games provides us with an alternate way to immerse ourselves in the rich world of Westeros through ***The Game of Thrones*** board game. In the game, players assume control of one of the major houses (Lannister, Stark, Baratheon, Tyrell, Greyjoy) as they struggle for military and political dominance over the shattered kingdom. And while knowledge of the story isn't required to play and have fun, it helps the in-game banter.

The rules are very simple and streamlined for a game of this scope and complexity. They can be explained in about 15 minutes to anyone familiar with any other strategy games. Meanwhile, grasping the multitude of factors that go into winning may take many games. The game not only requires a knack for strategic thinking, but also relies significantly on a player's bargaining and bluffing skills. This, coupled with the relatively small size of the game board (in terms of land and sea spaces), forces a lot of interaction between players. The game is very skill-intensive as the only random components are the Events.

A game turn consists of three phases: Westeros, Planning, and Action. During the Westeros Phase, random events are determined by revealing the top card of each of three event decks. They may have an impact on the military units (muster and supply events), the political situation and orders available in a given turn (by barring orders like Defense). Of special note is the event "Winter is coming," which causes the whole deck to be reshuffled, so there is never a guarantee that a given event will not happen again.

Upon resolution of all three random events, the Planning Phase starts. Orders are assigned to each area (not unit) containing one or more army units. Orders are assigned in secret by placing the upside-down order chits on the board. Each house is given a limited amount of order chits, which makes controlling a spread out force very complicated. Players assign orders simultaneously and are not allowed to show the played chits. This gives ample opportunity to perform surprise attacks, backstab allies or bluff defenses.

When everyone has assigned orders, all the chits are revealed and the Action Phase progresses. Resolution is performed in round-robin order with each player resolving one action or passing, if they have no more orders of the given type.

The first of the resolved actions is pillage. Units ordered to pillage harass an adjacent area by removing another pillage, support or consolidate power order from that area. Once all the pillage orders have been resolved, units carry out movement and finally consolidate power orders.

Whenever a unit enters an area occupied by an enemy force, battle ensues. The strength of the armies depends on the number and type of units. Additionally any unit adjacent to the battle that has been assigned the support order may assist one of the sides. This is the point, when your allies have to show their true colors. Finally, each player reveals a card from his house deck, which consists of major characters from the books. An army leader chosen this way adds his strength to the combat result and may invoke a special ability, modifying the battle results or impacting the game. Once used the card is discarded, but when a player runs out of these, he returns *all* of them to his hand. This creates interesting game play situations, where holding back in the fighting (to save cards) or picking small battles, just to go through your hand, are valid strategies.

The losing side's forces are usually just routed with little to none casualties. Actually destroying units requires more

complex maneuvers like surrounding them, following up on the attack or using some of the characters special abilities.

Military power is reliant on capturing and holding cities and fortresses (for marshalling points) and areas that provide supplies.

The other major aspect of the game is the political maneuvering. Raw political power is represented by Power Tokens, which can be gained by holding certain areas of the board and by issuing the Consolidate Power orders to the house troops. Power tokens are spent to maintain control over territory and to counter the Wildlings attack event. However, their most important use is during the "Clash of Kings" event.

This event changes the political landscape of Westeros. Players bid for control over three political areas of influence. For each of the three biddings, players select a number of their power tokens and reveal them simultaneously. The size of your bid determines the order of influence in each category:

- The Iron Throne governs the order the players take their turns, additionally the highest bidder holds the Iron Throne and resolves ties in the other biddings
- The Fiefdoms govern the winner of ties in battle, additionally the highest bidder holds the Valaryan Steel Blade, allowing him to add +1 to one combat result per turn
- The King's Court governs the number of bonus order chits a house is allowed to play per turn, additionally the highest bidder holds the Messenger Raven, which allows him to change one order after all the chits have been revealed.

The game ends after 10 turns are played through. This is not a lot, and forces players to make quick plays and maximize any advantage they can get. The winner is determined by the number of cities and forts controlled by each player, with ties being resolved by the number of supply resources and power tokens controlled. The game can also end early, if one of the houses captures the required number of cities and forts.

The game components are high quality. The board is large with clearly marked spaces and icons for the different resources. It also holds spaces for tracking game situation, but lacks a space for the Event decks. Wooden army unit tokens (Footmen, Knights and Ships) are painted in five distinct colors, a simple but elegant solution. The different cards are full colored with nice illustrations as are the different game chits. A tray is provided to hold all these pieces, and does a fairly good job at it.

A Game of Thrones is easily recommend to any group of players, especially those who relish the prevalent and interesting opportunity-cost decisions. However, players hoping to get the most out of it have to be able to be ruthless and cutthroat, which may turn off more tame gamers. A definite plus is that the game plays out in a reasonable time period (the initial review game took less than three hours). Finally, the game manages to capture the feel of the books, which is probably the number one concern with licensed products.

--Adam Cetnerowski

Lies, Dice, and Character Sheets

When I penned my column [last week](#), I had no idea the level of commentary it would spark over on the [message boards](#). Really, after a half-decade of cranking out my random thoughts, it's nice to know that I can still spark some of the ol' outrage . . . although I *do* question Gaston's decision to whip up his village into a torch-burning frenzy and storm my apartment. Really, it took a lot of effort on the part of my sentient bookshelves, couch, and cutlery to ward him off, as I was still deeply distraught over the death of my favorite candlestick.

Anyway, for those of you who missed it and don't feel like clicking the "last week" link, I basically confessed to enjoying surprise plots, both as a player and GM. I offered up a couple of anecdotes, one about a deal with a demon and another about a sack full of magic swords.

I'll summarize some of the comments this generated, and point out some other random thoughts as they spring to mind.

"Your suggestion smacks of adversarial gamemastering." For those of you unfamiliar, adversarial gamemastering is, as the name implies, a style of RPG where players treat the GM as the "enemy." Instead of viewing the challenges of the GM as something to be thwarted and defeated, such players skip the middleman and go right for the GM himself. This view probably comes from an offshoot of other types of games (board, card, etc.) as an extension of the idea that RPGs can be "won."

The charge of adversarial gamemastering was one of the first comments, and I found myself somewhat shocked by it. It took a while to realize why I was surprised, but I eventually concluded that it was because all my favorite campaigns (and the one from whence my demon tale came) were the *antithesis* of adversarial. I confess to being heavily in the "storytelling" camp of gaming, both as a player and a GM, and I have no problem bending the rules (or asking for the rules to be bent) if it makes for a good story.

While keeping secrets from the GM and/or other players could certainly be seen as adversarial, it could also be seen as a means of telling an interesting story – one which is entertaining for the entire group. (Of course, I also confess that my favorite movies are those which have interesting twists and surprises, and I consider them to be a fine way to spice up an otherwise mundane story.)

"The GM represents the universe, and you can't keep secrets from the universe." It's an interesting quandary, and one with profound metaphysical ramifications (not to mention first commandment repercussions).

I realize part of this might come from the fact that I didn't offer a crucial piece of information with my advice last week – one which I probably omitted because I considered it to be self-evident. Namely: As far as I'm concerned, if players want to spring secrets on the GM (which they're welcome to do in my games), they can never withhold *what* they are doing from the GM . . . only *why*.

Let's take two examples, both set in a typical high-fantasy world. In the first, the GM springs an adventure on the PCs where they need to come up with a bunch of money; the crux of the adventure (as the GM designed it) is to figure out a means of getting that money. One of the players says, "That's okay; for the past six in-game years I've been putting aside 20% of my income and investing it in the high-yield trade routes! Ha-HA! We're rich!" If this is the first that the GM has heard about this extra money, then that's not cool. It's totally not cool . . . if for no other reason than because the gamemaster had no chance to respond to the existence of that money previously with other story possibilities. (See? It's all about the story.) Besides that, the potential for abuse with new "unrevealed" information is staggering.

But let's take the example of this same group, where one of the members is a quiet cleric with a vow of poverty. As part of his meditations, he saves the usable seeds from his uncooked food. After clearing out one typical fantasy dungeon, the cleric's player asks the GM if this area seemed to be owned or claimed by anyone. Establishing that it hadn't, the cleric proceeds to plant the seeds on the land around the dungeon. Every time the players adventure by the area of the old dungeon, the cleric adds his other seeds, tending the fledgling grove and, again, establishing that it seemed to be unclaimed. He continues this for years in-game, making a nice quiet character-establishing subplot and

building up a considerable grove. At this point, the GM springs the “PCs need a bunch of money” plot. Believing the goal for which they need the money to be a worthy one, the cleric player reveals that he plans to beseech his church superiors to allow him to claim the garden he's been tending as his property, offering as evidence that he is the only one who has “claimed” the land – by his continuous actions – for the past several years; he would either like to sell the land to the church or a nearby noble. The player confesses that he had intended this plot of land as a means of possibly amassing wealth that may be permitted by his faith.

This example is, in my mind, entirely justified. All aspects of the plan had been established well in advance, and continuously verified. Only the “why”s behind it were mysterious.

"The gamemaster has some responsibility to allow these secret plans to 'work' or otherwise come to fruition." I'm not sure where this idea came from; I think it's because there's some presumption that, if a plan has honestly taken months (or years) of game-play time, it should somehow be expected to work.

At least in the case of the demon, I was pretty sure I emphasized that I was pretty sure (as a player) that it *wouldn't* work. But to my character, who was of average intelligence at best, it was the best plan he could think of. (As an aside, it was a particular delight to “give in” to playing a person of average intelligence with overconfidence; his usual course of action was to listen to everyone else's plans, nod at appropriate times, and then say something like, “I think a frontal assault would be the best plan; I think we can easily prevail.” This same plan was offered with the same earnestness whether the enemy in question was a pack of brigands or France.)

Secret plans carry with them, by their definition, a greater risk of failure. Really, the only reward for doing so (assuming one is not behaving adversarially against the GM) is for the thrill of the surprise.

"Players need to let the GM know everything they're planning." At this, I disagree. And the biggest reason I disagree is because, on some level, there's no difference between a brilliant plan that the player has been formulating for years and one he just thought of on the spur of the moment. Certainly both examples from last week were the sort that could just “happen” with a bit of thought (“Say, Ted . . . now that we're raising an army, didn't you have a bunch of extra magic swords? Maybe we could use them . . .”).

Of course, this could also be a reaction to the way I GM; I have enough to keep track of, what with making up stats on the fly and rolling dice and going “Hmm” a lot. I don't want to have to keep track of a jillion player plots as well.

As I've said before, secret plots should only be used to enhance the game, not diminish it . . . and I readily admit that not all games (or GMs) enjoy having things sprung on them. But, as a counterexample, one of the long-running games I was in was a **Changeling** campaign, where one of the annual traditions is “pranksgiving,” where the mischievous Pooka play pranks on everyone (and each other). Some of the most fun adventures I can recall stemmed from the plotting and scheming – within game – to bring various pranks to fruition. And those surprises – for GM and player alike – were usually a delight.

Of course, as ever, your millage may vary; talk it over with your gaming group; and, as always, have fun.

--Steven Marsh

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Chaos and Ritual

A Literary Magic System for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Elizabeth McCoy

There are many different kinds of magical systems in fiction. Of them, a goodly number break down into ritualized magic -- requiring diagrams etched into the floor, pentagram jewelry, herbs, potions, and other such paraphernalia -- and innate magic, which merely requires willpower, focus, and inborn magical talent.

Here, therefore, is one treatment that combines these options, as well as the regular *GURPS* system. (While *GURPS* is used here, any system with a similar "memorized list of spells" could probably be used, modifying as needed.) It also adds the useful cinematic concept of "going beyond your limitations -- then collapsing in a heap afterward."

Kinds of Magic

In the "Chaos and Ritual" system, there are three kinds of magic:

- *Rote Magic*, which allows the performance of rituals, without necessarily learning or memorizing any specific spell. (*Ritual* magic has a different meaning in *GURPS*, involving the summoning of spirits. It can be incorporated into rote magic if it fits the GM's image of how magic should work.)
- *Learned Magic*, which functions like regular *GURPS* magic.
- *Chaos Magic*, also known as *innate magic*, which draws on great power resources with little fine control, and a lot of intuition.

All three types have a minimum requirement of Magery 0, and the default assumption is that Magery is inborn -- you either have it, or you don't. While some magical experiments, accidents, or other extraordinary events might be able to grant Magery, it cannot be simply *learned*. (This is the easiest assumption to change.)

All the limitations from p. B67 are applicable, as is Magic Susceptibility (p. B143). Further, beginning characters may purchase "options" on further levels of Magery! Whatever level they stop at is considered to be that character's maximum Magery (barring, again, extraordinary events as above). If the spells in the world are frequently potent and terrifying, there is no hard limit on what this "ceiling" may be, and an "option" should be 1 point per level of potential Magery. This will *probably* self-select with a maximum of about 20, for 100-point starting character; make options 2 points in a 125-150 starting point campaign. If the cap is between 3-10, 3-5 points per potential level is better.

At the GM's option, potential Magery may add to Sense rolls to detect magical items or prerequisites to learn a spell, but it never adds to magical skills or affects the time required to learn magical skills. To turn potential Magery into an actual level of Magery, the wizard must finish paying for each level.

All mages may also purchase a "mana pool" to power their spells -- Extra Fatigue Points (p. B16), with the Limitation for magic only (-20%, based on the Focused limitation, p. B100). The higher the level of magery, the higher this should be! Characters with potential

Truth in Spellcasting

Some worlds have "honorable" villains who will follow the letter of their promises -- if not the spirit -- and can therefore be dealt with. These may be djinn, demons, or merely tricky mages. One way to explain this is to give *Magery* a Taboo Trait against lying!

The mage (or creature) may not have Truthfulness -- he's able to remain silent, or weasel logic like celtic knotwork -- but the principles of his magic state that when he's casting a spell, he's telling the universe, "This is what *is*." If he tells casual *lies*, the universe will stop believing him . . .

For every lie such a being tells, his skill with supernatural powers is penalized by 1. He must either make his lie into truth, somehow, or behave as if he had *real* Truthfulness for a period of time to earn back the universe's faith in his word -- this will be at least months, and possibly years.

Magery should have the ability to buy Extra Fatigue Points as part of the package, at least to the level of their potential Magery. For truly earth-shattering magics, their future extra fatigue may be limited by a *multiple* of their potential Magery, or have no limits at all!

Example: *Marie-Susan is starting out as a dimension-hopping character in a home-brew game. She purchases Magery 0 (as her home dimension has only secret magic) and a whopping 20 points of potential Magery, for a total of 25 points. (She also adds 5 Extra Fatigue Points, for another 15 points.) When she falls through the magical wormhole, she quickly uses nine of her earned points to upgrade to Magery 1 -- with 19 levels of potential Magery to go.*

Rote Magic

To use rote magic, a wizard need only have the right books and two skills: Thaumatology and Rites.

Rites is a Very Hard skill, defaulting to -7, which may be used with DX or IQ as appropriate. It is, essentially, the art of following magical instructions. Used with DX, it involves drawing perfect pentagrams, copying arcane scripts, and making correct gestures. High Manual Dexterity may add to this, and the default might be applied to Artist in some situations. Used with IQ, it allows temporary memorization of spell words, correct pronunciation, and other short-term mental requirements. High Manual Dexterity does *not* help with the IQ aspects, though Language Talent and Eidetic Memory might, and Performance skill could be used for the default. Some rituals might require musical instruments, and be bardic songs -- or even require conducting a full orchestra!

Unlike Thaumatology, Rites may be studied by anyone who has a good excuse to practice the necessary skills; would-be occultists, overly-obsessed gamers, or "deluded" new-age witches are all likely to pick up a little of this skill.

Thaumatology (p. B225) allows the rote-mage to tell a true magical tome from a fake, research new rituals or modifications to existing ones, and fill in the gaps in poorly-written spells. It is not strictly necessary for a beginning student -- if there are grimoires that are *meant* to teach the novice.

Casting a spell from a book typically requires two *checks* for the Rites skill, one for the physical components, and one for the vocal ones. Roll *once* for the skill, and then apply it to both IQ and DX. Use the lowest margin of success, if applicable.

Example: *Marie-Susan finds herself in the library of the Master Mage. Since she was going through a phase of "white witchery" anyway, she gleefully makes off with the first book she can lay hands on. With IQ 13, DX 10, and 1 point in Rites, she will be checking any rolls against a 10 and a 7, respectively. Hopefully she won't choose to practice dangerous spells that require perfect pentagrams . . .*

Spell prerequisites are not needed to perform most rote-based spells -- the instructions were written by someone who *knew* the prerequisites -- but Magery prerequisites are still in effect. If a spell requires Magery 2, and you have only Magery 0 . . . Oh, well. A kind GM may allow the attempt, but at a penalty to Rites skill equal to the amount of Magery lacked.

A rote-cast spell takes *at least* ten times as long to prepare and cast as a learned (see below) version, or longer, at the GM's option.

Spells may be learned from books, of course. Some rituals are long and complex and may never be attempted outside of the warded pentagrams, but others can start out being performed by rote with elaborate trappings and -- if points are spent on the spell skill itself -- become mental constructs, with all the ritual contained in the mage's mind and only a few words required to activate it.

Learned Magic

When a spell has been learned, either after rote repetition (above) or Wild Talent inspiration (below), it is treated in the

default manner of **GURPS** spells, as per **GURPS Magic** or chapter five of the Basic Set. This includes the need for prerequisites!

Example: *The spunky and precocious Marie-Susan, having stolen the Master Mage's book of Gate spells, has been dimension-hopping with glee -- and some close calls -- for a while now. Putting a point into the Plane Shift spell (p. B248), she can now dispense with much of the paraphernalia that the ritual casting required. (The GM, perhaps unwisely, has ruled that prerequisites are not needed for Plane Shift.) Watch out, multiverse.*

Chaos Magic

A chaos mage has the Wild Talent advantage (pp. B99-100), with the Focused limitation (magic only) and Retention enhancement. Many also have Emergencies Only. Any successful use of this ability may also justify upgrading a level of potential Magery to actual Magery, if the points are available!

If it pleases the GM, a chaos mage may receive a small bonus to the Wild Talent roll if someone is using magic *on* him at the time -- especially if a useful Wild Talent manifestation would be the same kind of magic, or a very specific counter.

Again at the GM's option, two basic "chaos skills" may be available, upon which other, more specialized skills, can be built: Shielding and Chaos Jet. These have no prerequisites save the chaos mage Wild Talent package, but tend to cost a lot. (Chaos mages should have lots of Extra Fatigue Points.)

Chaos Jet

Essentially, pick a missile spell attack, such as Fireball (p. B247) or Lightning (p. B244), and apply the +0% Jet enhancement (p. B106) to it. It costs the maximum amount to cast, and the same to maintain, but does not need to "build up" in the caster's hand.

GMs with **GURPS Magic** can select an appropriate Jet spell, instead. A chaos jet is *not* limited to 3d of damage or three yards, but each additional yard of range *or* each additional die of damage costs an extra fatigue point. (So a 4-yard, 4d chaos jet would cost 3+1+1 points of fatigue, or 5 fatigue.)

Also up to the GM is whether or not the chaos jet is actual *chaos* (with, presumably, different properties than fire or lightning), or if the Wild Talent has merely latched onto some random Jet/Missile spell, with potentially unusual special effects or nuances.

Shielding

If using only the **GURPS Basic Set**, Shielding is actually a variation of Armor (p. 253). It has no maximum DR, and manifests as an "aura" of protection around the mage, but it is full cost to maintain and only protects against magical attacks -- fireballs, lightning bolts, Chaos Jets, etc. When the enemy wizard tosses a fireball, and the chaos mage puts up his arms to instinctively defend himself and the innocent bystander behind him, the fireball will splatter with great pyrotechnics a few inches away from the chaos mage's face. (Unless some of the damage gets through the DR, in which case the chaos mage is going to look sunburned.)

If using **GURPS Magic**, the GM may prefer to adapt Force Wall (p. M170).

When defending against spells that do not have a properly cinematic physical manifestation, the GM *may* let the chaos mage adapt Shielding (half its DR applied to the mage's roll to resist), or allow a roll against the chaos mage's Wild Talent in order to add Magery and potential Magery to the resistance roll.

Example: *Proving that the GM gave her too many points to start with, Marie-Susan also purchased two levels of the chaos mage Wild Talent, with Emergencies Only, for 30 points. The first time she's attacked by a would-be robber, she manages to activate a (relatively low-power) chaos jet. The robber, sensibly upset, runs away, and Marie-Susan does a*

little dance of glee.

Epic Fatigue: Going Into Debt

Normally, a mage who wants to cast or maintain a spell beyond his normal limits must burn hit points to power it. This may not be suitably cinematic, especially in circumstances where the characters are being required to exceed their limits again and again. Extra Fatigue Points help, but even they can be used up in titanic battles of power and magic.

Going Into Debt is an optional rule to pair with the Chaos and Ritual system. It allows a caster to spend fatigue now, and pay for it later.

Going into fatigue debt is much like dying, at least in the mechanics; see p. 327. First, the mage runs through all his fatigue points. Then, instead of spending hit points or falling unconscious, the mage must make a HT roll. If this roll fails, the caster must make a Will roll to maintain concentration, *and* take one hit of damage. (This damage does not affect casting new spells.) Either way, the caster has now gone into fatigue debt -- he has access to a full multiple of his prior fatigue points, but the *instant* he stops maintaining his last spell, he will take 1d hit points of damage and fall unconscious until this fatigue debt is recovered!

Just as with additional multiples of HP can be gone through before death, further multiples of FP can be gone through. Each multiple requires a HT roll and may inflict a hit of damage, and each "threshold" passed adds 1d of damage to the eventual toll the mage will pay.

Example: *Marie-Susan is heroically protecting a great hall while her friends escape and summon her arch-rival and romantic interest, the Master Mage. The GM has **GURPS Magic** and has allowed MS's Wild Talent to latch onto Utter Wall (p. M170). Covering an area of 5 yards across, she's dumping 20 fatigue points into the effect per minute. With only HT 10 and 10 Extra Fatigue Points, she's gone into fatigue debt by the first minute. She fails her HT roll, takes one hit of damage, makes her Will roll, and continues for another minute. After a total of five minutes (and three failed HT rolls) later, her friends arrive with the Master Mage, who uses Create Gate to rescue them all. Marie-Susan, already at -3 HP, takes a whopping 4d of damage, goes to -5 HP, and faints dramatically as the gate closes behind them. Fortunately, between Healing and Lend Energy (she needs to recover 100 fatigue before she can wake up!), she awakens with little harm done.*

Now she just has to deal with the debt she owes the Master Mage . . .

A Flash And A Bang: Alternate Gunpowders

"The second kind of flying fire is made in this way: Take 1 lb. of native sulfur, 2 lb. of linden or willow charcoal, 6 lb. of saltpeter, which three things are very finely powdered on a marble slab. Then put as much powder as desired into a case to make flying fire or thunder."

-- from the *Liber Ignium*, attributed to "Marcus Graecus"

The above quote is the earliest recipe for gunpowder written in a Western language, and may be the earliest such recipe anywhere. Dates for the *Liber Ignium* range from the (quite unlikely) first century A.D. to the (rather more likely) 13th century, which would be roughly contemporaneous with the first unequivocal Chinese gunpowder recipes that survive. (Although you can just make a case for the 11th century in China, depending on how you translate the Sung annals.) The point being that militarily useful gunpowder just sort of appears with a flash and a bang in the mid-fourteenth century in both China and Europe, overlaying any previous notions of fireworks or Roger Bacon rockets. Within 150 years, the "gunpowder empires" form from Louis XI's France to Ming China, held together by centralized monopolies on expensive artillery batteries. This pattern, rough-hew it as you will, will likely be true regardless of when you add gunpowder to the historical mix. Each major center of wealth will build a dominant force of cannon, knocking down outmoded fortifications of local rivals and expanding outward until it hits a similarly wealthy cannon establishment in two centuries or so. Technicalities like the naval broadside or Vauban's siegeworks aside, it's a relatively straightforward process that would apply to Egypt, Assyria, Rome, or whoever you wish to anachronistically gift with black powder.

And therefore, it's not really for us. This column looks rather at how to treat gunpowder symbolically and (perhaps) magically, rather than at the logistics of the Roman siege artillery train. So inhale the sacred smoke of the gunpowder oracle, and breathe deep the acrid fumes of possibility. Three shots reverberate in the back alleys of history and myth; let's listen for the echoes.

"Then there was a crash and a flash of flame and smoke. The waters of the Deeping Stream poured out hissing and foaming: they were choked no longer, a gaping hole was blasted in the wall. A host of dark shapes poured in. 'Devilry of Saruman!' cried Aragorn. 'They have crept in the culvert again, while we talked, and they have lit the fire of Orthanc beneath our feet.'"

-- J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*

The walls of Parisiorum and Aurelianum would hold against any barbarians, no matter how foul, no matter how clever. Even the all-devouring Huns, under the lash of the Scourge of God himself, Attila, would fall back from their battlements, built by the Romans in the ancient time. But fall they did, in a flash of flame and smoke. Aetius and Theodoric rode under the banners of the West to meet the Huns on the Catalaunian Fields, and were themselves destroyed. The few refugees who escaped spoke of fire and thunder hurled from catapults and cunningly buried underground to destroy heavy cavalry before it could charge home. Where Attila had gotten this "ignis orcus," this "all-devouring fire," none could say -- perhaps from the dark gods of the Huns, perhaps from some alchemist's tower in the uttermost East, perhaps from the "Cunning Man," the Searu-Man whispered by Saxon axe-men to walk in Attila's train. Soon Ravenna and Rome fall, ancient walls blasted to new rubble, and the men of the West pull back ever farther. Where can aid be found? From the White City to the East, whose stewards huddle behind the tallest walls in the world? From the sea-born line of Meroveus, fallen on the Fields but destined by holy blood to rule Gaul? From the forested isles of the slim and graceful Albi, retired from the world for generations, to the north? Is there another fire-worker wandering the West who might give light where all is darkest? Hope must come from somewhere, a sacred Cup to quench the all-devouring Fire, or the hordes of the Searu-Man will swallow the world.

This setting can trend toward Tolkienesque high fantasy (keeping magics sparse to save the flavor) or grim low history, per GM whim. It reverses the usual course of things, in which gunpowder is the ace in the deck of civilization, for a symbolic recasting as chaos and death corned into fine grains. If a "good" gunpowder-worker shows up at all (if one is even possible), he should be reticent to use his skills for aught but fireworks and illuminations. PCs should not have access to powder at all, being Roman knights, Frankish paladins, holy priests of Jupiter or Jesus, and other

upright upholders of order and life. If the PCs have access to magic, it should be the magic of light and health, to further emphasize the contrast.

"'Nobody can make fireseed but the priests of Styphon,' Xentos told him. 'That was what I meant when I told you that Styphon's House has great power. With Styphon's aid, they alone can make it, and so they have great power, even over the Great Kings.' . . . No wonder this country, here-and-now, was divided into five Great Kingdoms, and each split into a snakepit of warring Princes and petty barons. Styphon's House wanted it that way; it was good for business."

-- H. Beam Piper, *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen*

None but the Church could make fireseed, for it required the personal intervention of Saints Barbara and Catherine, who would not approach any but the celibate and holy. For five hundred years, churchmen supplied the faithful with muskets and bombards, tipping the balance against emperors and kings who sought too much power too fast, keeping the battlefield level for all good sons of the Church. But for the soldiers of Christ in the Holy Land, the Church perforce had to be more generous -- rifled muskets with flints instead of matches, and hand-gonnes machined to the ultimate of power and lightness for fighting from horseback. After all, the Knights Templar defended the Faith at the outermost point of the Church's bayonet. They became proud and wealthy, stirring envy in both Rome and Damascus. Worse yet, rumors spread that the Templars had learned the secret of fireseed -- and that it had more to do with Saracen alchemy than with priestly piety. When news reached the Vatican of the Knights combing through the manure piles in the Stables of Solomon, Pope Innocent IV gave the order: the Templars must be destroyed. His opportunity came with the Seventh Crusade, which allied the Templars with the far too independent and pious Louis IX of France. Papal machinations with the Saracens (including covert shipments of fireseed to the paynim via the Venetians) betrayed the Crusade in Egypt and Jerusalem, and the Templar threat ended in 1249 in blood and fire.

But Innocent did not expect there to be survivors. He did not expect that a bare few Templars, scarred and angry men with nothing to lose, would emerge from the smoke, stalking out of the heat-distorted deserts of the East and back into Christendom with vengeance on their minds. He did not expect to face gonneslinging Templars who knew the secret of fireseed -- and knew that the Church lied. The PCs, needless to say, are these two-gonne Templars, pistols hanging off mailed hips and looking for revenge. This can be played as a Western, with the drifting Templars blowing into some remote barony and cleaning up the place, or as action-movie cinematics featuring clockpunk gadgets on the walls of Avignon and endlessly-firing miraculous gonne-fu across the Lateran Palace. Either way, the theme is Van Vogtian: "The right to make weapons is the right to be free." GMs can introduce low magic, if they like, but it fits the H. Beam Piper model best if the vengeful Templars merely have unlikely science and pure hearts on their side.

*"Besides, that both his puissance and his might
Are such, as in our age are matched of few,
Such is in evil deeds his cunning sleight,
He laughs to scorn what wit and force can do.
Strange arms he bears, unknown to any wight,
Save him, of the ancient nations or the new:
A hollow iron, two yards long, whose small
Channel he loads with powder and a ball."*

-- Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, IX:28

It is the Renaissance, the rebirth of humanity, of human proportions in all things from architecture to the dance. The art of the fence brings out the ultimate in martial virtue, while the art of love brings poetry and painting to new heights. Truly this time is a golden age of noble attainment for all, even the lowest-born can aspire to success in the new guilds and the new sciences. But into this glorious fresco comes a shadow, a splash of black and scarlet across the face of civilization. The German necromancer, Berthold the Black, has invented a most parlous engine that reduces all men, no matter their virtue, to meat and maggots. His engines of death appear in the hands of heretics and witches, and where they strike, demons and vampires stalk the night. Only the most puissant cavaliers, the most holy priests, and the most charismatic courtiers can withstand its call -- to might undeserved, to death unconsecrated, to equality unearned.

This is less a setting than an approach, mirroring the 15th-century frustration of Ariosto, who found himself forced to put guns into his 9th-century fantasy epic in order to stay modern. In this Renaissance (which might be our Earth, or

any highly pleasant fantasy world), the gun is an unequivocally evil magic item. In Ariosto's poem, it was the buried thunderbolt of Jove, dug up by Satan and shown to a German necromancer who reverse engineered it into a firearm. In this mythic approach, perhaps guns take minuses if used by day, or cannot kill anyone with True Faith (as happens to Orlando later in the poem when the gun misfires and kills his horse instead). Using a gun is Black Magic, costing sanity and soul, draining human abilities for art, romance, and swordplay. Those killed by guns rise again as vampires, or otherwise gain evil puissance after death.

Pyramid Review

Dark Inheritance (for Spycraft)

Designed by [Mythic Dreams Studios](#)

Published by [AEG](#)

Written by Alex Flagg, Scott Gearin, Chad Justice, & Jason Olsan with Gareth Hanrahan, Aaron Rosenberg, Wil Upchurch, & Sam Witt

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258-page b&w hardcover; \$34.99

Originally released by Mythic Dreams Studios for the [d20 Modern Roleplaying Game](#), *Dark Inheritance* is designed for [Spycraft](#). AEG's *d20 System* RPG of espionage and intrigue, adds a rich bitter streak of dark mythic horror. Now adapted to the *d20 System*'s most complex RPG, *Dark Inheritance* centers on and builds from a single world-defining event, known as "The Rip."

On February 9th, 2004, at 6:31 am, the disputed city of Jerusalem changed beyond recognition. In an obscuring cloud of dust, the city's fabric was torn apart by causes unknown. Immediately quarantining the city, the Israeli government conducted rescue missions, and now carries out investigations in cooperation with the USA and the UN. Religious observance has grown, and with the relocation of the Israeli capital to Tel Aviv, Arab-Israeli relations have also improved. Indeed, the PLO and Mossad have allied temporarily to determine the cause of The Rip. Elsewhere, reports of animal attacks and sightings of monstrous creatures have grown. The most notorious include an attack on hikers in Australia's Kakadu National Park by "winged" crocodiles, and over 40 people disappearing in New York's Central Park and the subsequent discovery of 15 mutilated and dismembered bodies. Central Park still remains barricaded, while the creatures responsible have been dubbed "demons."

What the world's governments had been keeping secret was eventually revealed by the International Geographical Society. They had an archaeological team digging near Jerusalem, which entered the city following The Rip. Documenting what they saw, they discovered that Jerusalem had merged with another city, from a world that became known as the "Otherworld." Today, access to Jerusalem is strictly controlled and a science team has established an outpost in the Otherworld. They have discovered a strange energy both there and in Jerusalem, drawn from a sub-atomic "ethereal" dimension.

Other secrets remain hidden, protected by agencies older than the KGB or MI6, with ancient origins and very long-term agendas. The Brotherhood of the Rose uses any means necessary to protect the Catholic Church, its members having been granted dispensation for sins committed in the course of their duties. The Eight Heavenly Dragons, the world's preeminent triad, were formed from a merger of a holy order of monks, the Fists of Righteous Harmony and the Four Skies Triad. First Team are mercenaries for hire, Special Forces *par excellence*, who ruthlessly protect both their identities and reputations. The Africa-based "Fugo a Watu" keeps track of the bloodlines known as Legacies,

which mark those individuals who have inherited the godgene. The IGS is dedicated to exploring the planet and revealing its discoveries across all media. Project: TITAN is a NSA black project, attempting to control the godgene and recruit the Titans to serve the USA, while Project: CHIMERA creates human-animal hybrid super soldiers. The Promethean Order is an ancient order dedicated to studying the Craft (or magic) that failed to foresee the events of The Rip.

Each agency is nicely detailed and presented as a threat if the players are part of other agencies. They also work as vehicles for particular genres. Thus the Promethean Order are an arcane order apart, best typified by *Highlander* and *Charmed*. Project: TITAN mixes espionage and monster horror such as *Alias* and *Predator*. IGS combines science, exploration, and adventure like *Tomb Raider* and *Veritas: The Quest*. Fugo a Watu mixes science run amok with mystical conspiracy, typified by *Dune* and *Dark Angel*. First Team is in the elite military genre of *The Dirty Dozen* or *Ronin*. The Eight Heavenly Fists combines the criminal underworld with martial arts in *Big Trouble in Little China* meets *The Sopranos* style. The Brotherhood of the Rose is for "Soldier of God" games, a combination of *Brotherhood of the Wolf* and *Millennium*.

Besides these allegiances, players can take new backgrounds, department, and more radically, a "hybrid macro species." Six are given -- feline, canine, piscine, reptilian, rodentine, and ursine -- but more could be created. All are for the Gene Soldier Prestige Class and part of Project: TITAN. ***Dark Inheritance's*** other Prestige Classes are the Witness, who monitors the bloodlines for the Fugo a Watu, and the Edge Master, essentially mystic swordsmen. The basic classes are more generic: the Advocate, tenacious believer of a cause; the Explorer is very Lara Croft-like; while the Martial Artist, the Sleuth, and the Scientist are all self-explanatory. All of the classes are supported by a plethora of new feats.

Magic in ***Dark Inheritance*** has been eased greatly by the advent of The Rip, with casters commanding energies drawn from the Ethereal plane to power incantations. These rely upon an understanding of symbols, represented by the Arcane Craft skill, and a focus, which links the user directly to the ethereal. Other Craft users, the Gnostics, are innately linked to the ethereal and are essentially living foci. Both are represented by the Arcanist and Gnostic classes while the two-fisted God of Guns Prestige Class combines gun-fu and magic; and the Promethean Order's Watcher monitors and recruits Titans. Again Craft use is supported by a plethora of feats and skills, plus descriptions of Craft related domains. Any character can become a Craft user by selecting the Novice or Postulant feats. This allows the casting of 0-level spells with safety. A spell list is included, but any ***d20 System*** spells could be adapted.

Characters can also be heirs to a Legacy. These are the inheritances of the title, the godgenes that empower the Titans. Also known as Inheritors, Titans fall into five different lineages that each possesses three different legacies, powers, and abilities that push a Titan beyond being mere human. Selecting a Titan macro species character option replaces his early experience and training in the form of a department. As he gains levels, a Titan gains Birthrights, abilities whose use requires a Strain check. Except for a critical success, use of a Birthright inflicts Strain on a Titan leading eventually to fatigue and then exhaustion. Essentially Strain prevents overuse of a Birthright, and further each time he is exhausted, a Titan must make another check, failure indicating a legendary transformation, the Titan taking an element of the birthright that caused their exhaustion. Besides this danger, each lineage also has weaknesses that can be exploited by others. The five lineages are the Crimson Lords, extreme hedonists who like to lead from the front; Hidden Suns, hackers with a fascination for hidden lore, secrets and death; Storm Crows, warriors with a clouded gift for divination; Void Phoenixes, agents of entropy and rebirth, marked by ever increasing monstrous and inhuman traits, the enemy of an ancient foe; and the Wild Bloods, nomadic guides and warriors known for ferocious rages.

For the GM there is some background given on The Rip, plus the current state of Jerusalem, and also of Pioneer Base, the Otherworld outpost. Several Otherworld creatures are also described along with a complete cult, which has grown in power and ability following The Rip. The monsters themselves are not that interesting, but again, the ***d20 System*** is rife with suitable creatures to replace them.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

So what is going on in ***Dark Inheritance***? Having read the book, it can be summarized as follows. (If wrong, I apologize, but then the book does not actually give you just the facts.) Millennia ago, the Progenitors overthrew the

Ascendancy, the Empire of the Host, binding their spirits onto the Abyss. In 2004, someone caused The Rip (the book does not say who), releasing the Demonhost back into the world. This is the current situation . . .

[END SPOILER ALERT]

There is also the question of what to do with **Dark Inheritance**, as scant advice is given for the GM. Obvious options are campaigns that focus upon one agency or Titans against the Demonhost and its allies. If the GM wants to include more of the book's character options in his campaign, he is on his own, as the book lacks GM advice. Another suggestion would be to run an ordinary espionage campaign with this book's various organizations as its foes, though there are again difficulties with this, there being some differences between **Dark Inheritance** and a regular **Spycraft** campaign. Primarily these include the use of the **Stargate-SG1 RPG's** Resource Points to replace Gadget Points, and the increased gadget and vehicle cost to reflect limited access to either.

Dark Inheritance requires another editorial pass, but is an otherwise well-laid out and good-looking book. Some art is pleasing evocative, but much is too cartoon-like to match the setting. Additionally, the missed details of some agencies' secrets are another handicap, as is the dearth of GM advice. The result is the book just throws a box full of character options at the players, all built around a somewhat unexplained setting. Yet this background is interesting and evocative, building from the single world-defining event. The five lineages do feel like **World of Darkness** RPG factions, but less confining and broader, while the various agencies lend themselves to differing but enticing genres and styles of play. Overall, although not as well developed as it could be, **Dark Inheritance** is still evocative and full of potential.

--Matthew Pook

Storming Post-Modern Fortresses

or, Dungeons and Dragon-boats

by Eric Funk

"We found the derelict, all right, just where the old man's map said it was. What we didn't realize until later was that while we were studying it, it was watching us."

-- Overheard in a bar

Fortresses and hostile vessels may be considered to be futuristic equivalents to dungeons. This has the classic appeal of combating traps and hostile denizens in a labyrinthine environment whilst carrying laser pistols and grav belts. Alien temples and crashed ships are popular places for adventurers to visit, and are sometimes one and the same! Some derelicts just sit idly by while a band of adventurers wander in and kill local monsters, while others take an active role in keeping such intruders out. This article discusses mundane tactics, if the GM allows either the defenders or infiltrators to possess esoteric abilities, such as psionics or Ancient artifacts, the playing field may be quite different.

There are generally two kinds of mission, the first being Extraction -- the retrieval of a person, item, or data. This can also include surveillance. Not all of these are necessarily hostile -- defectors, prisoners, and some data may go willingly. The second kind of mission can be called Destruction -- the assassination of someone, destruction of data or equipment. Subsumed within this type of mission is warning the victim by leaving a calling card such as a message or knife. A prerequisite of Extraction is escape, while Destruction missions may be suicide runs.

Planning

To plan an assault, the most prepared teams may try to determine patterns.

Capability

Who designed the fortress? Who has occupied it since? Who uses it now? What did they use it for? What Tech Levels were involved in any of the former? The choice of stealth and contravention equipment will be greatly affected by these things.

Combination of Traps/TL and either Architecture/TL or Strategy(Land) may be able to reveal areas of buildings and natural fortifications that could contain areas hard to monitor with sensors, line with traps, or just be hard to defend. On-site inspection could replace the Architecture/TL with an Electronics Operation(Sensors)/TL roll (see p. CV21). Tactics or Strategy(Land) may also aid in preparing or expecting troop movements.

Intelligence

Recognizing trends can point to times of relative weakness (use Architecture, Intelligence Analysis, Research, or Strategy). For example, knowing in advance that a blackout sandstorm is coming, the guards rotate every 20 minutes, and sunspot activity will be interfering with radio range can give a team a great advantage. Some other examples of cycles include guards, maintenance, laundry, catering, guests, tourists, herd migrations, tides, rivers, lava, weather, meteor showers, and solar wind. How will the facility react to and prepare for these situations?

Intelligence can also include land contour maps, pictures of facilities, vehicles, and personnel -- all as detailed and current as possible. As technology progresses, the quality/cost ratio of tools reasonably affordable for civilians improves to the point that fairly detailed maps can be readily available, if several years out of date. Portable tools and computing power allow tourists to have complete maps and holovids of their trips. A covert team with enhanced

equipment could obtain a lot of data. Depending on the availability of Contragravity and thruster technology, satellites could be launched cheaply, further peering into strongholds and passively analyzing traffic.

A local guide can be a mixed blessing, with knowledge of recent movements, troop actions, and faces, but the potential for an independent agenda, or even allegiance to the enemy! Finding a guide with a high Area Knowledge skill and testing his skills and loyalty while avoiding detection by the local forces can be an adventure in itself, especially if even a handful of locals support the base to be assaulted! Even rumors could put the base on alert. Alternatively, an unwilling guide is caught in a dangerous position, as he may be killed by either party, whether or not he leads them into a trap.

Getting In

Getting in is usually portrayed as harder than getting out (except for prisons). Brute force is as effective as in other ages, which is to say, it doesn't work all the time, but it does have its place as a talent. Small groups allow greater deniability, require smaller holes in security to pass through, and need fewer forged IDs, but will possess a smaller skill base.

Computers and electronic locks for the most part replace mechanical systems. The scrawny tech shines at this point, breaking out a SQUID (see p. R30) to hack into systems. It can be an amusing situation to role-play the grunts lugging the "geek" around as well as the turnabout as the tech disables the death traps. "Realistic" code decryption requires massive computing power and lots of time. An alternative is to get a password from an existing user by one of bribery, telepathy, gunpoint, or even a self-sticking note beside the monitor or under a keyboard.

Ideally, agents should have equipment of a higher Tech Level than that of their opponents. This allows sensors to circumvent many kinds of older spoofing technologies, and provide a greater relative effectiveness of stealth equipment. The optimum choice of stealth equipment requires knowledge of what sensors are installed. Contravention equipment, such as electronic lock picks and robotic eyes must be chosen carefully and usually require the skill of Electronics Operation (Security Systems) (see pp. UT 83, RO 30). GURPS Martial Arts also contains many styles of moving undetected.

"In the final analysis, the safest way to defeat a security system is to have someone on the inside!"
[--GURPS Covert Ops](#) p. 95

Infiltration is the art of sneaking, completely avoiding detection. Complete stealth is increasingly difficult as the power and variety of sensors increases with each tech level. On the other side of an "impenetrable barrier," employees may be unsuspecting if the installation has not been penetrated (as far as they know). Computers, however, are ever vigilant, unless they are intelligent enough to become bored.

Infiltration usually requires [unconventional/concealable weapons](#) such as gun gloves, garrotes, pen guns, and lighters. Outdoors, trespassers may parallel main trails to follow maps, but indoors, one can follow pipes, vents, and service shafts.

Vents, pipes, and access spaces break down into three categories: Small spaces only large enough for tiny robots, rats, and unusually [small persons](#). Crawl spaces (such as the "Jeffries Tubes" from [Star Trek](#) allow only one or two unencumbered humans to crawl side by side, unable to stand. Characters are at -4 to attack other while they are crawling (see p. B98), and -2 to be hit while kneeling (see p. B 118). Service tunnels are common in castles, manors and other environments with heavily stratified social groups. This allows peasants and nobles to go about their daily lives without seeing each other. In fortresses, they may also exist to allow technicians to move large parts and pipes around. A staple of invasion/counter-invasion is that one of the sides take to access and service tunnels which often contains a less effective sensor net and are harder to seal off for some reason.

Impersonation can be described as the art of moving overtly, yet misidentified as someone or something that belongs there. ID Transponders, IFFs, and keys are rotated in realistic bases, with frequency increasing at more secure locations, and also with the stage of alert (such as when an attack is expected). Time lag of interstellar communications

may allow interception and forging of false data. It is up to the GM to decide how easy it is. As valuable as tools are, sometimes "human" skills such as Acting, Administration, Disguise, Fast-Talk, Lip-Reading, Savoir-Faire, and Language skills can often replace them in convincing a local guard or official to open doors or locks . . .

Forceful Entry

Breaking in forcefully becomes no tougher as the tech levels of the defenses increase, merely doing so undetected becomes trickier. "Fortress" class walls are described on p. VE167 as possessing DR100+ and 200+ hit points. The myriad GURPS world and tech books contain a large variety of assault weapons. The following are but a few concealable examples:

Incendiary Grenade (TL7) \$11, 2 lbs (see p. SO 105), Pocket Jet Torch (TL7) \$7, neg. wt., Holdout +2, no electronics (see p. CV55), Laser Torch, Light (TL8) \$25, 1 lb (see p. R23), Plasma Torch (TL9) \$188, 4 lbs (see p. R23), Plasmafaust (TL9) \$500, 2 lbs, a HEAT plasma thrower (see pp. RO20-21)

(All prices are at optimum construction -- TL of origin +2.)

When all else fails, hand-packing explosives to form a HEAT effect can be done with a roll against Demolition/TL (see p. HT27 for details, p. CV83 for Detcord, and p. UT68 for Plastex and Plastex-B).

Towers are one type of structure that returns to being more easily defensible at TL8+. No-fly zones combined with effective sensor nets and automated defenses restore its solitude. Until the advent of contragravity, a tower away from cliffs will have little to fear from the air. "Stealthy" entry is only possible at entrances, usually only the top and bottom, which means bypassing sentries of one sort or another (but see Forceful Entry, above).

A TL9 Extra-Large HEAT Warhead				
Bore	Damage	Mass	Cost	Comments
16mm	5d×2(10)	0.06 lbs	\$2	Strategically placed, this can disable electronics and vehicles (see "Components and Damage," p. VE183)
40mm	6d×4(10)	1 lb	\$30	This can easily penetrate DR50 (see p. HT26-27 for making holes in armor).
45mm	4d×10(10)	1.5 lbs	\$44	DR100
50mm	5d×15(10)	2 lbs	\$60	DR200

Egress

"This ship will self-destruct in five minutes . . . Have a nice day!"
--Computer, *Spaceballs: The Movie*

Many structures and ships in cinema are set to begin a self-destruct sequence as soon as their inner sanctum is breached. This often causes secondary explosions throughout the facility that are as close the heroes as possible without really harming them. It can also act as a buffer, closing off access to areas behind them, and some paths out. GMs must decide carefully whether to announce (and keep careful track of) a timed countdown. Otherwise, exactly the same stealth considerations are required.

Adventure Seeds

Mapping: The crew is hired (to pose?) as civilians for a mapping mission. They might be told that it is a simple mineral survey. The catch is that they are not told about a secret base in one corner of their assigned area.

- As above, but they are warned of an indigenous low-tech culture (just how low-tech is up to the GM).
- As above, but there is also a rival survey party.
- As above, and there is a saboteur hidden on the ship.
- As any of the above, but the secret base they are unwittingly mapping will shoot them down when they enter a

communications "dead" spot at the edge of the area. The dead spot may be due to natural interference or a jammer.

Infiltration: The party will be given false background papers that will allow them to infiltrate a compound. Inside, they must:

- Contact someone, smuggle in and/or out a message, data.
- Plant a listening device/bomb.
- Obtain/Sabotage plans for a battle station.
- Start rumors.

Bibliography

Pyramid Links

- ["Use of Weapons: Arming Characters for a GURPS Space Campaign"](#) by Stephen Dedman
- ["Honey, I Shrunk the PCs"](#) by SwiftOne
- [Designers' Notes: GURPS Covert Ops](#) by William H. Stoddard & Hans-Christian Vortisch contains many tools from TL 8 to TL16)

GURPS References

- ***GURPS Traveller: Starports: The XT Line*** (pp. 69-70, and sidebars on pp. 72-73) is an example of security checkpoints across a variety of tech levels.
- ***Black Ops***: This is *the* resource for preparing hyper-trained super-normal commandoes. The five bases are examples of secure facilities built with different priorities. This book contains five different ready-made 650cp commandos, specializing in over-the-top and cinematic styles.
- ***Covert Ops***: This book focuses on GTL0-8 technology with a few suggestions for ultra-tech gear.
- ***Espionage***: This book and its examples concentrate on attacking the human side of the equation.

Cinematic References

- *Alien* Quadrilogy
- *Die Hard* 1 & 2
- *Dr. Who: The Five Doctors*
- *Under Siege* 1 & 2

Other References

- [Centauri Knights](#) for Big Eyes, Small Mouth by David Pulver

Victoria Litvanoff

for *Call of Cthulhu*

by Tom McGrenery

An inhabitant of Shanghai in the 1930s, Victoria Litvanoff is an unpleasant, opportunistic villain suitable for *Call of Cthulhu*, or any game set between the wars. Although the stats below profile her as she was in 1936, there is of course no need to feel bound to the exact historical dates.

A dark-haired woman who appears to be in her early 60s, Mrs. Victoria Litvanoff is in fact only in her forties. She was born somewhere in Russia in 1893. She claims to be half-French but is actually entirely Russian. Her face is long and heavy-set, with prominent eyebrows. Her pseudonyms include Madam Ganette, Victoria Seou, Madam Dafin Desmond, and Dauphine Desmonde. She has lived in Manchuria as well as Japan, and has visited most of the major cities of China.

Victoria Litvanoff has married four times so far. Her first husband, a Russian army officer, died on the Eastern Front in the Great War. Her second, one Baron Toll, was killed during the Russian Revolution. The third, Captain Koishi Senoo of the Japanese Army, died in the Japanese earthquake of 1923. she married her fourth husband in Shanghai, in 1924. Nikolas Nikolayevitch Litvanoff is some ten years younger than his wife. As a boy he attended the Khabarovsk Cadet Corps School in Russia. He joined the White Army aged sixteen and fought against the Bolsheviks. He became an assistant tutor to the Russian Cadet Corps in Vladivostok, before moving to Canton as a member of the Portuguese River Police. He later set up as an electrical contractor in Shanghai, which was where he met his wife.

Mrs. Litvanoff operates as a clairvoyant in a subdivided office on Nanking Road, which she shares with a Chinese doctor called Liu Ding. In order to preserve an aura of mystery, the doctor invites clients to wait in his surgery when Mrs. Litvanoff changes from her ordinary street wear.

Once inside Litvanoff's cubicle, the client finds her dressed in a long black gown and hood. Only her hands and eyes are visible. The room is lit by candles in a brass sconce, while a human skull rests on a table in the corner with two crossed thigh bones in front. She is evasive about just where and how she obtained these human remains.

Clairvoyance is illegal in the International Settlement. However, as a White Russian, Litvanoff lacks a nationality and so falls under Chinese law. As a result, the International Police are unable to arrest her, at least for the crime of clairvoyance. She often uses the information she gathers during these fortune-telling sessions to blackmail her clients. She also kidnaps white women and sells the to brothels, as well as running a few brothels of her own.

Mrs. Litvanoff also enjoys performing as a stage magician and escapologist, though her opinion of her own skills is vastly inflated. Her act, which includes card tricks and 'escaping' from some obviously loose handcuffs, is lacklustre at best.

The Shanghai Special Branch is very keen to arrest Mrs. Litvanoff. Unfortunately for them, she knows her Shanghai law very well and always manages to keep one step ahead.

Mrs. Litvanoff's life is currently rather troubled. Last year she ran a successful house of ill repute in the French Concession. Its reputation was so ill that it prompted the French police, who in the normal run of things just couldn't be bothered, to make a raid on the place. In escaping arrest, Mrs. Litvanoff fell down a flight of stairs and broke her hip. This left her with a limp and the unwelcome prospect of having to start again from scratch. Starting again wasn't all that hard. It just took another change of name and a new location. She was able to evade the law by switching back and forth between the International Settlement and the French Concession. When she is wanted in both places (a common occurrence), she goes to her house in the Outer Roads' Area.

The Outer Roads' Area is a suburb full of large foreign-owned houses on the outskirts of the foreign-run districts. No one knows who has jurisdiction over the Outer Roads' Area. The International Settlement claims the highways, since they built them. Houses on the highways, known as the Municipal Roads, pay taxes to the Municipal Authority of the Settlement and are subject to its laws and police protection. Houses off the roads fall under Chinese jurisdiction. But what exactly counts as being "on" or "off" the road is still undefined. Sometimes the Chinese refuse even to recognize the International Settlement's claim to the highways.

Mrs. Litvanoff rents a house in an alleyway under Chinese jurisdiction with one side facing a Municipal Road. As a location for a hideout, it is in a perfect state of legal limbo. To get the house, Mr. and Mrs. Litvanoff paid two months' tax in advance to the International Settlement, and haven't bothered paying since. The authorities can do nothing to evict them.

Having fled the French Concession, the Litvanoffs found a new place for business, hired some girls and opened up shop. Then something unexpected happened. Mr Litvanoff fell in love with Veronica, one of his wife's White Russian employees. The two of them ran away together and now live in two small rooms on Weihaiwei Road. As if that wasn't bad enough, he set up a house of ill repute specialising in the same kind of unpleasant things his wife's businesses had offered. Mrs. Litvanoff first attempted to commit suicide, then went to the police. She reported his activities, but they simply showed her the door. The police records note that the complaint was made by Mrs. Litvanoff the "notorious . . . procurer for all forms of debauchery." In return, Nikolas and Veronica sent an anonymous letter to the Special Branch claiming that she was a Bolshevik spy (one of the few things she isn't guilty of). Their feud continues, as does the police force's effort to capture Mrs. Litvanoff.

Victoria Litvanoff

Occupation: Criminal

Birthplace: Russia, exact place unknown

Sex: Female

Age: 43

STR: 8

CON: 10

SIZ: 12

DEX: 11

APP: 9

POW: 14

EDU: 15

Hit Points: 11

Sanity Points: 50

Skills

Accounting 20%

Bargain 30%

Conceal 55%

Disguise 60%

Fast Talk 35%

Hide 30%

Law 50%

Locksmith 60%

Occult 15%

Other Language Chinese 52%

Other Language English 37%

Other Language French 30%

Other Language Japanese 50%
Own Language Russian 75%
Persuade 65%
Pharmacy 45%
Psychology 66%

At the Keeper's discretion, Victoria Litvanoff's psychic powers may actually have some substance to them, though the exact details are left up to the individual.

Pyramid Review

Libris Mortis: The Book of Undead

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Andy Collins & Bruce R. Cordell

Edited by Michele Carter, Kim Mohan & Cindi Rice

Illustrated by Tom Kidd, Thomas Baxa, Steve Belledin, Jeff Easley, Steve Ellis, Wayne England, Emmanuelle Hunter, Jeremy Jarvis, Chuck Lukacs, David Martin, Michael Phillippi, Steve Prescott, Wayne Reynolds, Brian Snoddy, Dee Barnett, Dawn Murin, Trish Yochum, Dennis Kauth

192-page full-color hardcover; \$29.95

Hell is full and the dead walk the streets of your game world. They may not be easy to pen up, but at least the gamemaster can get a handle on widespread evil with *Libris Mortis: The Book of Undead* from the vampire wranglers at Wizards of the Coast.

Assuming everyone loves the undead (a pretty safe bet given the state of popular culture), such a volume should come as no surprise. Neither, for that matter, should the layout. Undead creatures? Of course. Feats? You bet. For PCs and NPCs? Natch. Some specific observations, then.

There's a little more campaign advice here than in previous Wizards of the Coast products, though not a whole lot. You get a short introduction to what undead are and how they unlive, eat (eww), and procreate. Theories on whence they come, examples of cities and religions for the cosmopolitan zombie, and advice on strategy when facing (or being) the dead (especially the self-aware threats) make good reading, but these are sadly brief.

Too much "campaign" advice is just lists. Sure, there's helpful info on what Undead X is liable to do in combat. Then again, there are seemingly promising sections like "Incorporeality," which suggests a primer on effective power use but turns out to be rules and mechanics. Useful (read: necessary, particularly those bits not repeated from *Monster Manual III*), but more stuff like the material on using undead as masterminds would be preferable.

And the lists seem to be mostly page-fillers. There are sample NPC versions of undead, like vampires. Okay, good, pick one of those and stick it in your game (and it's a helpful example of laying templates over stats), but you're not buying a rogues' gallery book...10 of them is over(un)kill. Variants can surprise heroes -- faster zombies or resilient skeletons -- but even those straightforward monsters get lists: dire rat skeletons, T-rex skeletons, ogre skeletons, etc. Some maps of mortuaries and other undead haunts pepper this section, and a number of small, undead-centric groups and mini-fleshed-out dungeons (*all* underground) give the DM someplace to display his unliving creations.

Feats are listed in "Character Options"; it pulls triple duty with "Undead in the Party." That goes on almost two full pages before it gives way to undead character classes. A few more PC/undead tips are scattered about here, mostly presented as reasons for those things to become adventurers, but even this boils down to "avenge loved ones, get revenge for being made undead, or atone for your evil." The feats are the sort of grave-born goodies you might think -- once you have the power to drain someone's stats or turn the morbid hordes, you'll want to crank those abilities up.

Keepers like the stitched-flesh familiar are few and far between, though the mother cyst plays a big part in magic.

A mother cyst is a painful swelling of necrotic flesh or energy somewhere on your body. You can draw upon it to power effects, though the spell lists make it seem like a pretty ugly, dodgy deal. A lot of the magic deals with necrotic bloats, explosions, dominations -- it goes on. The upshot: If you have a cyst, others may be able to target it (and therefore you) to pop out of your skin, eat your brain, or scribe through your senses. The spell lists aren't exclusively about this -- still plenty of new ways to protect yourself from or summon undead, or duplicate evil tricks like sucking life -- but cysts are a feature for the book.

Equipment is short and sweet. Their best showings are the armor, with spirits and skins made into protective devices, or giving weird powers and shadowy abilities; and the undead grafts that, like a creepy kind of cyberware, let you replace your body parts with those found in a barrow.

The prestige classes are even more lacking in substance. There are hunters and servants of the undead, bards who use sorrowful tunes, and a variety of people using magic to bend, break, or build the unliving. Classes for the undead are just ramped-up beings, like master vampires.

One item for which to fall to one's knees and give thanks: undead traits are listed at the monster chapter's outset. Some creature features are still repeated to the nth degree -- everything seems to have grapple -- but key elements are dealt with and done with. Some of the names alone are cool as all get-out: bleakborn, blaspheme, voidwraith. While there are crawlies aplenty, a fat pile of them are templates for the GM to lay over other beasts or beings. Some make sense, like mummified beings, and some meet you halfway, like the half-vampire. Most aren't all that impressive or seem like new ways to say the same old thing. Necropolitans renounce life, but they go through a ceremony to do it -- oh, well. Evolved undead improves those undead who've been at the death and decay game longer than most of their ilk. Keen bits like the raiment (a living set of clothes) and the revived fossil template are among the better ideas, but there are few true standouts. In the plus column, the creatures run the gamut of challenge ratings, so not everything is a ground-shaking powerhouse -- some things even your starting PCs can go after.

The artwork doesn't use darker tones here than in other Wizards of the Coast products, but that can make the disturbing, corpse-riddled imagery, contrasted with its bright, fanciful colors, that much more striking. That, and it's the usual classy Wizards output.

Libris Mortis isn't so much an out-and-out disappointment as it is a conversation with an interesting but distracted friend. So many parts start out well but trail off into mediocrity, or never quite seem to finish what they're saying. The writing is good but unfocused, and the result is another patchwork of half-decent ideas directed more at filling out the page count than fulfilling its purpose.

--Andy Vetromile

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Me Am Smart Some Day

Let's say you have a piece of somewhat obscure hardware that you're trying to get working for your computer. If, after downloading and installing the drivers on your primary computer, the computer fails to recognize the hardware . . .

And if, after trying to install the drivers on two other computers, with two different operating systems, the computers still fail to recognize the hardware . . .

And if, after getting fed up, you format and reinstall the operating system on your primary computer in an effort to get a clean slate for the hardware to be recognized, and the computer with its new installation *still* doesn't recognize the device . . .

Make sure you downloaded the right drivers in the first place.

This has been free computer advice from your friendly neighborhood Steven Marsh.

Over the past couple of weeks I've been regaling you with tales of my previous gaming exploits, mostly centered around one long-time character's ill-advised plan to resolve his Faustian deal. (This well-thought-out "plan" primarily centered around telling the demon, "Thanks for the power, but I've changed my mind. Have a nice day!") This week's column stems from thinking about this gaming anecdote, as well as the above computer episode, which happened to . . . err, a friend.

It's difficult to convey, but one of the reasons I particularly liked this scheme against the demon was not because I believed (as a player) it would work; rather, it was a plan my character believed would work, and -- more importantly - it wasn't a great plan.

But first, I might need to give a bit of information about White Wolf's old (and, I suppose, their new) Storyteller system. One of the reasons I like Storyteller is because it's pretty darn grainy; attributes (as well as skills) are ranked between one and five, with two as an average score. This makes it *very* easy for me to make characters. Is the character considerably below average? He gets a one. Average? He gets a two. Reasonably above average? Three. Doctoral-level? Four. Pinnacle of human ability? Five. This is certainly easier for me to wrap my mind around than trying to figure out if Aunt May has a 17% Strength or maybe deserves a 19%.

Anyway, I consider myself to be pretty darn smart; in White Wolf terms, I'd probably give myself a four in Intelligence. (And, lest it seems egotistical, I assure you that those attribute points were strip-mined from others. Perception? Appearance? Strength? Who needs it?!) In comparison, my character had an Intelligence of two, *and* he was Overconfident. Thus, I tried to play him as much less quick on the uptake than I am.

Now, this plan was the first time I can recall where I "got it," having achieved a state of Zen with my character where I was able to think as him, instead of making purposefully dumb decisions. Ultimately, I realized that the means of doing this was to go with the first or second plan I thought of, especially if it felt "Overconfident." (His plan for fighting vampires in a burning building? Lock himself *inside* the burning building with his enemies.)

I'm pretty sure I've dealt in past columns about playing characters who are smarter than ourselves. (This advice mostly centered on trying to spend more time thinking about it even though the character came up with the plan "instantaneously," as well as the GM having the character's plans work more often; it *must* have been a good idea, because otherwise he wouldn't have thought of it, right?) But playing someone who is *less* intelligent, wise, or perceptive than us is, I argue, more challenging, at least to get it right; there's a tendency in many games to simply ploink the player's mental acumen into the character's body, regardless of what the stats say. In fact, the old FASA **Dr. Who RPG** required this; basically, "your character is only as smart as you are."

For me, at least, I realize now that the key to playing this character -- like all characters -- is to try to recreate not only the actions, but also the thought processes behind them. *Not* having this foundation makes playing such characters

more difficult, since it's easy to slip up. For example, I found myself aghast when playing another low-intelligence character (definitely below average) to discover that I'd been using phrases such as "tabula rasa" and "cogito ergo sum" in casual conversation.

And for those seeking to hone this sense in their own games, I'd recommend trying to look at how your own thought processes work. For example, as my computer example above showed, I tend to be very intelligent and doggedly stubborn in achieving results, but have a habit of making faulty assumptions or overlooking the obvious. Thus in most games I'd have a high intelligence but lower perception and/or wisdom. If I wanted to play someone of a similar intelligence (or, at least, the same results as someone with similar intelligence) but with a difference process, I might consider a version of my mind that is much more perceptive, using that information to eliminate bad ideas immediately. Or I might play someone who doesn't have as much book learning, but has such a honed sense of intuition that he can arrive at a good solution by other means.

Cogito Ergo Sum: I think; therefore I am. By extension, *how* we think determines *how* we are, and it is this understanding that can make our characters truly interesting and memorable. It's not easy for many folks (myself included), but the rewards can be considerable for many kinds of games.

Although, admittedly, perhaps not as considerable as avoiding formatting one's computer without a good reason.

--Steven Marsh

More Questions than Answers

Scenes from a Larger World

by Chris Aylott

Every now and again the country mouse goes back to the city. It's a little after 10 in the morning on Sunday, February 20, and I'm riding into Penn Station, New York City on a trip to Toy Fair.

First held in 1903 as a way to show American toys to retailers heading to Europe on buying trips, Toy Fair has grown into one of the largest trade shows in the world. It fills the Javits Convention Center and several other buildings on Broadway and Fifth Avenue. About 1,400 manufacturers attend from 30 countries, showing their wares to thousands of retailers, distributors, and reporters.

This is where the big guns come out. Every major toy gets launched here (not always successfully). Millions of dollars get committed to the toys that will line the shelves when Christmas rolls around. Toys"R"Us is here, and so is the Gap. As I walk into the Javits Center, I'm surrounded by people who can spend more on one product than my store makes in a year.

What the heck am I doing here?

A Brave and Noble Quest?

There is something missing at The Space-Crime Continuum. We moved most of a year ago, and book sales are exploding. New sections of history, food, science, and general fiction are paying off, adding a lot of sales to our old stand-bys of science fiction and mysteries.

The games aren't keeping up. There's some growth, which isn't bad in a year when most of the other hobby game retailers we know are crying in their Bawls. But more visibility isn't translating into more hobby gamers. What we get is more people asking for classic games and toys. Dominoes, mancala, **Monopoly**, **Cranium**. Mainstream games. Educational games. Games for kids of all ages. No dragons need apply.

So here I am, standing at the top of the escalator, looking at a slice of one of the exhibit halls. I see seven aisles in front of me, each one running back about 200 feet. The exhibitors are corralled in little stalls, most of them ten feet by ten feet. You could put an orc and a chest in every stall and level up halfway down the aisle.

To my left, there's a guy bouncing 12 feet in the air on a pogo stick that looks more like a jackhammer. In front of me, the Hohner company is selling a miniature Steinway piano and a drum kit just right for a four-year-old. Brainy Baby would like me to know that nine months is not too young to teach my baby girl about baseball, golf, and soccer. They have instructional DVDs; they must know what they are talking about.

That's just a third of the hall. There are another 14 or 15 rows I can't see, another hall above me, and a whole building of manufacturers that I have no chance of getting to in the short time I have here.

Overwhelmed, I turn right and scurry towards the relative safety of "The Game Zone," two aisles devoted to showcasing the smaller board game manufacturers. I tell myself I'm starting to look at product, but what I really want to see is some friendly faces.

A Sea of Absent Friends, with Islands

There are no manufacturers of roleplaying games at Toy Fair. Not even Wizards of the Coast is there -- Hasbro needs

more lead time for their products and has moved its marketing to the International Fall Toy Show in October. (Both Toy Fair and the Fall Toy Show are run by the Toy Industry Association; the October 2005 show will present products intended for Christmas 2006.) What hobby game fans call an "industry" doesn't even exist in the minds of the toy buyers at this show.

There are some names that would be familiar to *Pyramid* readers. Decipher has its card games and ***How to Host a Murder*** sets. Days of Wonder, Mayfair, and Rio Grande are showing off their wares, as are a bunch of other small makers of board games and card games. Later in the afternoon, I'll pass the Koplow booth, which features the same display of dice I've seen for years at the GAMA Trade Show. One of the Koplow reps is trying to explain what a 20-sider is used for to an older toy retailer, and he's not having much luck.

I pass these manufacturers by for now, and will ignore most of them completely. I know what they sell already; I need to find the games I don't know. I'm not even shopping yet, just looking for a bolthole. I find it at the Alliance Distributors booth.

Alliance is the 800-pound gorilla of hobby game distribution, with four warehouses and some of the best retailer support programs in the hobby. If you sell hobby games and you're not a fool, you deal with Alliance. Here, they seem almost inconsequential -- another 10'-by-10' booth and few piles of board games and card games on display.

A distributor can't help but have a low profile at this kind of trade show. The manufacturers are the stars here, and the distributors know it. But I'm surprised Alliance doesn't have more booth visuals showing off what it really sells -- the easy-to-use website that I place orders on every week, the monthly catalog magazine, graphics of its speedy delivery, pictures of salespeople and warehouse staff being happy and efficient.

These are all ideas that Alliance's salespeople can communicate, and Alliance has some of its best people on hand doing just that. But why isn't the booth design supporting the work that the salespeople are doing?

As I hoped, I have some friends at the Alliance booth. Customer service guru Mike Webb is there, along with sales manager Marc Aquino. I shake Marc's hand and congratulate him on his recent promotion, inwardly cursing the loss of my favorite sales rep. Mike and I trade stories about the kids. We make plans for lunch, and I start to relax. Maybe this place isn't so scary after all.

Edging along the Beach . . .

Off to wander the booths. I indulge myself with a stop at Days of Wonder. I first met Mark Kaufmann at the GAMA Trade Show in 2003; I liked his company's style from the beginning, especially its commitment to making a few great games and keeping those games in print. Now I had to thank Mark for making me so much money over the last two years.

I also wanted a look at ***Ticket to Ride Europe***. We had done well with ***Ticket to Ride*** -- everybody had, to the tune of 300,000 copies sold in 2004 -- but I needed to know what new features would entice fans of the first game to buy the second. A young man named Robert Washington answers all my questions with a short and knowledgeable presentation.

Robert covers his points so well that I assume he is one of the Days of Wonder staff, and it isn't until I am talking to Mark later that I realize he is a board game fan hired for the duration of the show. This fan gave a better presentation than most of the game professionals I've talked to over the years. Why don't companies bring in more guys like him?

. . . and Wading In

I finish chatting with Mark, and I'm out of excuses. If I want to find new lines for the store, I'm going to have to talk to somebody new. I'm terrified. No matter what a distributor friend told me about how the exhibitors were eager to talk to small stores, I feel like too small a fry for them to fish for.

But as I walk around the show, I start to notice something about the displays around me. A lot of them aren't very good.

Some of them are good, some of them even better than good. Front Porch Games has bought a double booth at the end of the aisle and turned it into a mock living room with couch, coffee table, and bookcases. They sell high-end board games that look good in designer living rooms, and their games shine in the setting they've created. Even though their biggest games are a little too swank for my store's current audience, I'm all over their travel kits for chess, checkers, and poker.

There are other manufacturers whose booths stand out. Other booths look like the Alliance booth -- competent, with good games on display and professional salesmen ready to talk them up. But I see a lot of booths with not much more than a game on a table and what is obviously its inventor standing behind it. No signs, no pizzazz, just a stoop-shouldered designer watching the buyers pass him by.

A 10'-by-10' booth at Toy Fair costs at least \$2,600. That's a lot of money to spend and not get results. But a lot of those 1,400 manufacturers do just that. I walk down whole rows that seem to say, "Uh, we exist. Why don't you love us?" and the thought that's going through my head is:

"These people are just as clueless as I am."

Home from the Sea

If this were an inspirational fairy tale, I'd tell you about how I hooked up with a plucky little manufacturer and set out to conquer the world. Didn't happen. I filled my satchel with catalogs of interesting-looking mainstream games, talked with a few people about the dominoes and mancala sets I needed, and caught the evening train back to my family. Seven hours of New York is enough for this country mouse.

Short as it was, this trip was an eye-opener for me. It's hard not to think of the toy industry as separate from hobby games, even when intellectually you know that hobby games are just a little niche of a larger entertainment industry. Hobby game professionals are every bit as clannish as the fans they sell to, and only a few brave companies even consider leaving the cozy confines of the GAMA Trade Show and venturing onto the larger stage of Toy Fair.

And yet there is a continuity between hobby games and the rest of the toy industry. The big fish in toys may loom over the typical hobby game company, but the littlest players aren't all that different from each other. Hobby retailers struggle with a narrow slice of the problems that general toy retailers worry about -- which makes me glad, since I have enough work picking out games without trying to learn how to buy dolls, baby toys, and sports equipment. But the problems are the same problems.

Maybe it's time for more hobby game manufacturers to push out of the comfortable box of the gamer market. Not all gamer games are appropriate for a larger audience, but enough games do cross over -- **Apples to Apples**, anyone? -- to make pursuing the idea worthwhile. Even the mediocre hobby game companies make better-looking games than some of the games I saw at Toy Fair this year, so the only thing standing between them and the big time is subject matter, some marketing dollars, and the will to succeed.

The toy industry could use some fresh blood, too. Mainstream manufacturers have been feeling just as much economic pressure as the hobby companies. As I rode home on that train Sunday night, I flipped through one of the magazines I'd picked up at the fair. A headline caught my eye: "Breaking Out of the Juvenile Mode." The article underneath described how manufacturers and retailers are having trouble reaching the kids that used to be the bedrock of the business. It encouraged those manufacturers and retailers to look for new venues and new toys that appeal to older kids and adults.

Wouldn't it be funny if there just happened to be a niche of the toy industry devoted to making games for older kids and adults?

The larger world awaits.

Frank Hamer, Texas Ranger

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

"One riot, one Ranger."

-- Captain William McDonald

Captain Frank A. Hamer was probably the most famous of the 20th-century Texas Rangers, that old-fashioned law enforcement agency responsible for upholding the law in Texas.

This article provides a ready-to-play *GURPS Fourth Edition* representation of the real man for a Cops, Cliffhangers, or even a late-period Old West campaign. However, it might also be useful for *Call of Cthulhu* and *d20 System* historical settings, or other historical or pulp adventures.

Francis Augustus Hamer, usually called Frank or nicknamed "Pancho," was born on March 17, 1884 in Fairview, Texas. As a youth, he worked in the blacksmithy of his father, and then started working a farm at age 16, together with his brother. They got in an argument with the landowner, during which the man shot Hamer with a shotgun. Hamer could escape, and after having recovered, the boy went straight for the landowner and killed him in a duel.

This was only the first of many shootouts. Throughout his life, Hamer took part in over 50 gunfights and killed at least 20 men and one woman -- "not including Mexicans," as they used to say in those days. It was also far from the last of his many gunshot wounds; he was injured 23 times. When Hamer died, his body was covered with dozens of bullet and knife scars, and he still had some bullets and shot pellets under his skin.

In 1901 Hamer started working as a wrangler on the ranch of Barry Ketchum (brother of Tom "Black Jack" Ketchum, p. OW102), and continued to work as a cowboy for several years, until he helped catching a horse thief in 1906. This earned him a recommendation from the local sheriff to the Rangers.

He was already an accomplished outdoorsman and expert shot with rifle and revolver. In April 1906, he joined Company C of the Texas Rangers, where these skills were much in demand and further honed. He would endlessly practice his aim, and was able to shoot a hole into a silver dollar at 15 yards with his revolver. In addition, he had also learned [Savate](#) (p. MA99) from a French martial artist, and became famous for his kicks to bring down renitent offenders.

Hamer patrolled the South Texas border until 1908, when he resigned to become marshal of Navasota, Texas. In 1911 he left that post as a special officer in Harris County, but in 1915, he rejoined the Rangers. During the troubled period of the late 1910s and early 1920s, the Rangers received much criticism for excessive force and latent racism, but also managed to bring some order to the border area that was plagued by [smuggling](#), bootlegging, and banditry.

Hamer was absolutely fearless, but also without mercy. Neither characteristic necessarily makes for a good policeman, but at the time, they were thought highly of in a man of the law. He was ambushed four times by enemies, and twice left for dead. Hamer eventually caught up with all of his ambushers; none survived.

In 1920 he left the Rangers again for a short spell as a prohibition agent. He soon returned and was made Senior Ranger Captain on January 1, 1922, commanding all Texas Rangers. Hamer moved to Austin, Texas, where he made his permanent home. He had married Gladys Johnson in 1917, and the couple had two sons, Frank Jr. and Billy. As late as the 1920s, the Texas Rangers were mainly concerned with cattle thieves, as well as smugglers crossing the Rio Grande (the latter's trade soaring with the beginning of the prohibition, the tequileros working 1,000%-profit deals). Many of these criminals were Mexicans, which didn't improve the somewhat slanted outlook the Rangers often had towards anyone who wasn't white.

In 1928, Hamer left the Rangers and became a bounty hunter for the Texas Banker's Association. He was instrumental in exposing murderous police officers (including among the Rangers), who framed and killed innocent

people in order to collect a standing reward of \$5,000 for any dead bank robber. Hamer rejoined in 1929, but finally retired from the Rangers in 1933, forestalling being sacked like all other remaining Rangers by controversial Texas Governor Miriam "Ma" Ferguson.

However, in April 1934, he took up a commission to hunt down the infamous Barrow Gang (better known as Bonnie & Clyde) as a special agent for the Texas Highway Patrol. He was paid a measly \$180 a month; asked about this, he commented that "crime doesn't pay, not even for those who fight it." Hamer picked up their [trail](#) in Texarkana, Texas, but always seemed to be a day behind the murderous pair. He traced the gangsters for 102 days through several states, until he finally ambushed them with the help of several other lawmen on a dirttrack in the backwoods of northwest Louisiana on May 23, 1934.

His posse consisted of Officer Murray Gault from the Texas Highway Patrol (also a former Ranger), Dallas County Deputies Bob Alcorn and Ted Hinton (the only two lawmen who knew Bonnie & Clyde by sight), as well as the local officers Sheriff Henderson Jordan from Iverson County and Deputy Prentiss Oakley from Bienville Parish. They set up a camouflaged ambush site opposite a decoy truck on a sideroad in the vicinity of Plain Dealing, Louisiana, and waited more than seven hours in the bushes until the pair drove up in a stolen Ford V8 around 9:10 a.m. Accounts differ whether the outlaws got so much as a call to surrender (at least Hamer, Alcorn, and Hinton had a previous record of shooting first, asking later), but in any case the six officers ventilated the outlaws' car with 167 shots (emptying their shoulder arms and their side arms, and possibly even reloading) before they could do anything. It was instant "death for Bonnie and Clyde."

"I hate to bust the cap on a woman, especially when she was sitting down, however if it wouldn't have been her, it would have been us."

-- Captain Frank Hamer

Hamer became nationally famous overnight and received a citation medal from Congress. During the late 1930s and 1940s Hamer worked for various private companies as a strike-breaker and riot-control agent. He retired in 1949, and died at home on July 10, 1955.

Captain Frank A. Hamer

290 points

6'3", 230 lbs. (SM 0).
ST 13 [30]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 12 [20].
Dmg 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 14 [4]; Per 12 [0]; FP 12 [0].
Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 9*; Parry 9* (Karate).

Social Background

TL 6 [0].
CF 1930s USA [0].

Languages

English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Combat Reflexes [15]
Danger Sense [15]
Fearlessness 5 [10]
Fit [5]
Gunslinger [25]
Hard to Kill 5 [10]

Weird War

Captain Hamer was a capable law enforcement officer -- but he also thought of himself as a true warrior. In late 1939, he wrote a letter to King George VI of England, offering him his services. He boldly proposed to come to the British Isles with 49 hand-picked ex-Texas Rangers, to defend Britain against the Germans. This troop would probably have included his brothers Estelle, Harrison, and Flavus, all former Rangers like himself.

The King later thanked him kindly for the offer, but the U.S. government would not hear anything of it -- at the time, the USA was still officially neutral.

Legal Enforcement Powers [10]
Police Rank 3 (Captain, Texas Rangers) [15]
Reputation (Crimefighter, +2 from honest people/-2 from criminals) [0]
Status 1 [free from Rank]

Disadvantages

Addiction (Tobacco) [-5]
Bloodlust [-10]
Callous [-5]
Code of Honor (Police) [0]
Enemies [0 -- they mostly ended up dead]
Honesty [-10]
Sense of Duty (Texas) [-10]

Quirks

Careful [-1]
Chauvinistic [-1]
Quiet [-1]

Skills

Administration-11 (IQ-1) [1]
Animal Handling (Equines)-12 (IQ+0) [2]
Area Knowledge (Texas)-13 (IQ+1) [2]
Camouflage-11 (IQ-1) [1]
Criminology/TL6-12 (IQ+0) [2]
Detect Lies-11 (Per-1) [2]
Driving/TL6 (Automobile)-13 (DX+0) [2]
Farming/TL6-11 (IQ-1) [1]
Fast-Draw (Pistol)-16 (DX+2) [4]*
Forensics/TL6-10 (IQ-1) [2]
Guns/TL6 (Machine Gun)-14 (DX+1) [2]
Guns/TL6 (Pistol)-17 (DX+4) [12]
Guns/TL6 (Rifle)-15 (DX+2) [4]
Guns/TL6 (Shotgun)-14 (DX+1) [2]
Guns/TL6 (SMG)-13 (DX+0) [1]
Interrogation-12 (IQ+0) [2]
Intimidation-13 (Will-1) [1]
Karate-11 (DX-2) [1]
Lasso-12 (DX-1) [1]
Law (U.S. Police)-12 (IQ+0) [2]
Leadership-13 (IQ+1) [4]
Naturalist-11 (IQ-1) [2]
Navigation/TL6 (Land)-11 (IQ-1) [1]
Observation-12 (Per+0) [2]
Packing-11 (IQ-1) [1]
Riding (Horse)-13 (DX+0) [2]
Shadowing-11 (IQ-1) [1]
Smith/TL6-11 (IQ-1) [1]
Stealth-12 (DX-1) [1]

Realistically, it is unlikely that 50 aging policemen (Hamer himself was 55 years old at the time), however capable, would have made much difference in the Battle of Britain (pp. W17, W:AKM23-24) or the threatened German invasion (pp. W17, W:IC13, and W:WW7). Nonetheless, an alternate history campaign might see larger-than-life Texas Rangers rallying the King's men around them, triumphing against Nazi hordes, and ultimately changing history . . .

He also might have joined forces with other former police men such as William [Fairbairn](#) as instructors of special ops troops.

Streetwise-12 (IQ+0) [2]
Survival (Desert)-12 (Per+0) [2]
Teamster-11 (IQ-1) [1]
Tracking-12 (Per+0) [2]

Techniques

Back Kick-8 [2]
Kicking-10 [2]
Knee Kick-11 [1]

* +1 from Combat Reflexes

Description

Hamer was a tall, fit man, perpetually tanned and with brown hair and blue eyes. Like most rural American police officers of the early 20th century, he was always dressed in cowboy boots, dark trousers, white shirt, dark tie, and dark jacket, topped with a wide-brimmed hat and a cigarette between his lips.

For most of his career, Hamer carried an engraved .45 Colt M1873 SAA revolver with 4.75" barrel (pp. HT110, OW86, W:D71) called "Old Lucky," either in a holster on his right side, or, when he was no longer required to ride a horse, simply tucked into his waistband. When expecting a gunfight, he also took a .44 S&W Hand-Ejector revolver with 6.5" barrel for backup. His favorite longarm was a .30-30 Winchester M1894 lever-action rifle (p. HT114).

However, for the hunt on Bonnie & Clyde, he replaced the S&W revolver with a .38 Colt Super Auto pistol (pp. HT108, W:D71) and the lever-action rifle with a .35 [Remington Model 8](#) semiautomatic rifle (p. W:D72) with 20-round magazine extension (both weapons offering superior penetration against bullet-proof vests and the heavy Ford V8 sedans Clyde Barrow was partial to).

Hamer also owned many other guns. When the posse assembled in a hurry in a Louisiana hinterwald small town, three of the men could not bring their own long arms, and were outfitted from Hamer's personal rolling arsenal -- Gault got Hamer's .25 Remington Model 8 semiautomatic rifle, Alcorn his .30-30 Winchester M1894 carbine, and Hinton his .30-06 [Colt R80 Monitor](#) machine rifle (a variant of the M1918 BAR, pp. HT114, W:HS21, which was the chosen armament of the outlaws).

Hamer's Weapons

Revolvers

Guns/TL (Pistols) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC
5	Colt M1873 SAA, .45	2d+1	2	190/1,900	2.6/0.3	1	6(5i)	11	-2	4	\$240	3
	Long Colt S&W .44	pi+										
	Hand Ejector, .44	2d+1										
6	Special	pi+	2	200/2,100	2.8/0.3	3	6(3i)	11	-2	4	\$310	3

Semiautomatic Pistols

Guns/TL (Pistols) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC
6	Colt Super Auto, .38 Super Auto	2	180/1,900	2.8/0.4	3	9+1(3)	9	-2	3	\$300	3	

3d-2 pi

Rifles

Guns (Rifle) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC
6	Remington Model 8, .35	5d+2 pi	5	800/3,500	9.3/1.1	3	20(3i)	10†	-5	4	\$560	3
6	Remington Winchester M1894, .30-30 Winchester	6d pi	5	900/3,700	7.2/0.3	2	5+1(3i)	10†	-5	4	\$290	3

Light Machine Guns

Guns/TL (Machine Gun) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC
6	Colt R80 Monitor, .30-06 Springfield	7d-1 pi	5	1,000/4,200	17.8/1.6	9	20(3)	10†	-5	2	\$870	2

The Omniscient Eye

Everything You Wanted to Know About Silver (But Were Afraid to Hack)

While I am sure there was a problem with debased coinage in the mid- and late-medieval era, wouldn't the problem have been *much* worse in Scandinavia in the early medieval time, when coins were rare, so that barter was "balanced out" with hack-silver?

I can easily imagine some characters -- *especially* player characters -- acquiring a hoard of hack-silver (a dozen pounds, perhaps) and then deciding to "stretch" it by melting it down and adding something that is not silver.

First of all, how much can you debase hack-silver before it can be seen/felt? What would be the best metal to use for the purpose? How pure was Viking age hack-silver (most Viking age hack-silver was probably loot from raids on monasteries)?

Secondly, how difficult is it to melt silver? In terms of melting point, will a wood fire do or do you have to use charcoal?

Even if charcoal is needed, I can't see why characters shouldn't get away with it, consistently. Can you, Eye, come up with any realistic means to minimize this practice, or to discourage it entirely?

As long as the characters don't debase the silver too much, the only side effect I can think of is that it might disrupt the economy. But that is a slow process, and anyway I imagine the economy of Viking lands to be pretty flexible and robust, quite able to absorb large quantities of silver whenever spend-happy travelers came home with some.

--Peter Knutsen

For those not familiar with the phrase, "hack-silver" is a term used to describe fragments of precious metal objects used in Medieval northern Europe, often coins but also arm bands, necklaces, and other jewelry, hacked to pieces to get smaller and easier-to-circulate bits of metal. We'll concentrate with issues around coinage for the most part, but much of this is applicable to jewelry as well.

In an economy that runs without a lot of money, even a small silver coin is worth a lot, so cutting coins into more manageable bits has been practiced in a number of societies. For example, the English farthing, worth a quarter of a penny, developed from a practice of cutting silver pennies into quarters (or "fourthings"), and every pirate's favorite currency, "pieces of eight," refers to cutting Spanish dollar coins into eight wedge-shaped pieces. Many such coins were even minted with deep grooves to make it easier to divide them evenly. Hack-silver bits are typically more irregular than the even wedges of such divided coins. The Vikings were apparently far more interested in precious metal content than in any kind of stamp of official approval, so they used any precious metal object that came to hand and chopped them up as the occasion required.

Precious metal objects available to the Vikings would have come from a wide range of sources. Far-ranging Viking traders regularly visited Constantinople and the edges of the Muslim world, and they were hooked into trade networks that went all the way into China (an archaeological excavation of a Dark Ages Viking trading post in southern Denmark turned up a jade Buddha), so they traded in a variety of coinages. Even closer to home, they would have encountered a wide variety of coins. Much of northern and western Europe depended on supplies of ancient, Byzantine, and even Arab currency for money during the early Middle Ages. Some Merovingian kings were buried with gold coins minted under Alexander the Great, and one late ninth century hoard excavated in Holland held twice as

many Arab dirhems as coins minted by the Carolingian kings then ruling from nearby Aachen. Even when minting started again, counterfeiting and debasement were recurring problems. With coins minted across centuries and continents, there would be little or no uniformity in silver content. Many coins would have had precious metal contents of 80-95%, but it could dip as low as 25% for legitimate coins struck in that region during that period, or even lower for late third-century Roman denarii (if any of those nearly worthless coins remained in circulation) and counterfeits. And with no control exercised over the silver content of jewelry, the armbands and necklaces used as both adornment and stores of wealth could be of any purity.

Of the metals available in antiquity, three are likely candidates to mix with silver to produce a low-cost alloy: copper, lead, and tin. Though iron was widely used, furnaces hot enough to actually *melt* it rather than soften and weld it didn't develop until the end of the Middle Ages, making alloying it impossible, and many metals widely available today, such as zinc, nickel, and aluminum, weren't known or weren't available in sufficient quantity to be significant. Any coin is likely to have tiny quantities of at least some of the "big three" metals (most likely lead; most European silver came from galena, a lead-silver ore) as well as other trace elements in some proportion. Even the purest silver in antiquity rarely got above 95%, and most coins topped out around 92%. Copper will redden the resulting alloy if too much is added and make it lighter for its volume. Lead, a common additive to silver because it softened the metal and made it easier to manipulate, won't change color as much, but it will reduce the shine and hardness and make the silver heavier for its volume. Tin will have the least effect on color and weight, being a more similar color and about the same density, but it will still have an effect on hardness and shine. Tin is also rarer and more valuable than copper and lead, so cutting the silver with tin is less cost-effective. An ancient smith might also experiment with small quantities of sulfur, arsenic, and a few other substances, although their effect may be very subtle. Naturally occurring trace impurities of elements he is unable to manipulate or might be unaware of will also have some impact on the metal's physical properties, so even samples of "pure" silver, or any other metal for that matter, will differ from one another in small ways.

A dedicated forger could resort to coating a base metal object with silver leaf or a thin coating of molten silver. A few other techniques might become available to particularly clever alchemists. Some pre-Columbian metallurgists in South America hit on a method of chemically treating specially formulated silver alloys to leach non-silver atoms away from the surface, leaving a layer of relatively pure silver behind (they had a similar trick for treating gold alloys). For something even more effective but difficult to achieve, archaeologists working outside Baghdad shortly before WWII uncovered a number of small ceramic jars containing copper rods wrapped in iron. Chemical analysis indicates that the jars had been filled with a dilute acid solution, probably vinegar, wine, or grape juice. This would have made them weak but functional wet-cell batteries. Their actual use remains a mystery, but one suggestion is that they could have been used for electroplating. Either of these techniques would be more efficient, in terms of the amount of metal used, than relatively crude use of metal leaf, and far more suitable to reproducing the detailed surface features of coins. On the other hand, even coating with metal leaf requires considerable work and skill, and all of these surface treatment techniques are very vulnerable to detection if one breaks the treated object open or simply scratches the surface deeply, so alloying is probably the best approach to take.

Pure silver melts at 1,761° Fahrenheit, which is past what can reasonably be done with a wood fire. It's not impossible, but it would require absolutely ideal conditions and a very carefully constructed furnace, all of which would be a great deal of trouble to set up. That temperature is, though, well within the realm of temperatures that can be achieved with charcoal. Charcoal is relatively easy to produce (far easier than building a 1,700°+ degree wood fire), so the need for charcoal shouldn't be seen as a significant limitation. Given the limited menu, the choice of metals to alloy with won't make much of a difference so far as required pyrotechnology is concerned. Copper melts at 1,981°F, higher than silver but not so much so as to make a significant difference, while lead melts at 621°F and tin at a mere 500°F.

Though the idea of melting a bunch of metals together is simple in principle, actually doing it is no small task. Low-tech metallurgy requires skills gained only by long years of practice. In the imagination of most low-tech societies, the skills of smiths bordered on the magical, and with good reason. For example, the process of producing an appropriate alloy requires laying fuel properly to maximize airflow and get the maximum temperature, placing the material to be melted in an appropriate place within the pile of fuel, judging times, temperatures, and the composition of raw materials by look and feel, and using clumsy equipment in uncomfortably hot conditions. And that's just to get a lump of metal! Producing wire, tools, coins, or jewelry requires very specialized skills and equipment. Anyone attempting

even the most basic procedures without appropriate skills is likely to lose metal in the process, burn their fingers, or simply not get it all hot enough.

But all this really means is that unskilled characters won't be able to produce metal alloys at will. Someone with a bit of metallurgical ability easily can. A half-trained blacksmith's apprentice with basic tools could melt down coins and raw metals and produce serviceable ingots, which is all you really need for hack-silver. To produce convincing coins (carving a new die for striking coins or producing a copy of a die from an original coin) would be beyond the talents of a village blacksmith, but any city should have several jewelers capable of the task. The prospective forger would start by taking a casting of the coin in wax or clay to act as a mold to produce a die for striking his own coins. The new die won't have the same level of detail as the original, but it can produce reasonably convincing copies. A sufficiently persuasive character could simply subvert one of the makers of the original coins and get legitimate dies smuggled to him. The only really large challenge would be to create an inexpensive alloy that closely matched *all* the easily analyzed physical properties of the pure metal (color, hardness, melting point, density), which, under prevailing conditions, is a question of art, not science. So what's to stop a bunch of greedy PCs from cutting their stash to make it go farther? On the technical side, very little if they can find someone with the right skills.

What's *really* stopping them, though, is that no matter how much trouble they go to, they won't be fooling anyone. People accepting precious metals in bulk have historically *expected* metals of dubious purity. The coins and jewelry from which the hack-silver is usually derived, after all, are of wildly varying properties, so someone being offered silver fragments won't bat an eye if some are too dull, some are coppery, and some are rather heavier than expected. The real question isn't at what point someone can tell the metal has been debased, but rather the accuracy to which debasement can be measured and how much work one is willing to put in to measuring it. There are a number of assay tests which can be performed at low levels of technology. For example:

- Examining the color and shine closely.
- Scratching or snipping a sample to make sure the silver is uniform throughout.
- Biting to test hardness.
- Weighing the fragments and comparing that to volume (measured by, say, dumping them into a bucket of water) to determine density.
- Dropping the fragments on a hard surface and gauging the sound; a pure metal will have a slightly different "ring" than a debased one.
- Scraping the metal against a white stone and examining the mark. The color and refractive properties of the streak, which can be subtly different from the surface character of the object which makes it, is indicative of the composition of the metal.
- Melting down the silver. A skilled metalworker will be able to determine the approximate temperature at which the sample melts by sight, but an easier test is simply to melt the sample being assayed along with a sample of known purity. Any significant alloying will alter the melting point tremendously, and the sooner (or later) the hack-silver melts than the pure silver, the greater the impurity.

Of course, the same things that make smithing difficult (a complete lack of temperature-measuring equipment and the vaguest possible means of testing hardness, only moderately accurate weight and size measuring tools, limited chemical knowledge, etc.) also make determining the precise purity of metals difficult. What this means is that some people, mostly merchants, jewelers, tax officials, and others who deal with precious metals on a regular basis, will be better at determining the purity of hack-silver than others (if your game system of choice has them, assaying silver could be an application of merchant, blacksmithing, and/or financial skills), and at best someone examining the debased silver will be able to get a rough ballpark estimation of the degree of debasement. This will quite possibly be a very simple division between "good" and "bad" silver, and much quibbling over the precise value will follow. Rather than making it appear as though they have more silver, counterfeiters will simply be adding a bit to the uncertainty of the value of their metal which, if they're persuasive, they might exploit for some small gain.

Some of the tests listed above are also too much work for everyday use. How much effort goes into assaying the silver depends on the size of the transaction. If characters are using a small quantity of hack-silver to pad out the value of a larger purchase (say, a cow and a handful of silver for a horse), the seller is probably going to estimate the value of the silver by eye and perhaps one or two other easy tests. However, if they try to use a large quantity (say, a heavy purse

of silver for a large farm), the seller will want to be very sure about just what he's getting, and he may go through several assay tests. Consequently, characters might be able to pad out their "small change" purchases by a few percent, particularly among peasants and tradesmen in smaller towns, by alloying their silver, but they'll have much less luck with large purchases. And given the time and trouble the PCs would have to go to in order to create debased alloys at all, it's probably not worth the effort for the small benefit it would provide.

If PCs want to embark on a career in counterfeiting, then Viking Scandinavia, or anywhere pure metal content is the sole measure of value, is probably the wrong place to do it. Instead, they should try to take advantage of heavily monetized economies. Why? Two reasons:

First, in an economy where money is in heavy use, there's less of a perceived need to check the metal content of the coins (not *no* need, but less of one), which makes assay tests less likely. Certainly, if the precious metal content of coins issued by the government drops, the effective value of the currency will go with it, but as long as the coins PCs try to pass don't look too terribly different from those in circulation (say, within 10-15% of the metal content of existing currency, or perhaps more if they're particularly skilled metallurgists or can mix worse coins in with better or even real ones), they'll pass casual inspection. If they're available to the PCs, the exotic surface-treatment technologies mentioned above are also far more likely to work.

Second, there's a better return on investment. In monetized economies, coins tend to circulate at a slightly higher value than that of their precious metal content alone. The implied guarantee of a particular metal content and their status as legal tender for particular kinds of transactions (for example, certain taxes may have to be paid in coin rather than goods or even precious metal bullion) makes them a bit more valuable, probably on the order of 5% above their metal content.

Of course, there's a downside as well. If you're discovered debasing metal in Viking Scandinavia, you'll probably suffer social rejection and possibly a beating at the hands of annoyed customers. If you're discovered forging coins in a more sophisticated kingdom, you'll be under a death sentence. From very early times, forgery has carried the most severe penalties. There's money to be made in forgery, quite literally, but it's a very dangerous occupation.

--Matt Riggsby

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore with all. Or, at least, with all with valid *Pyramid* subscriptions.

The Omniscient Eye seeks to answer questions that are tied to knowledge of the real world, providing information with a perspective that is of use to gamers. The Omniscient Eye does not concern itself with specific game systems or statistics.

Do you have a question for the Omniscient Eye? Feel free to send it to pyramidquestions@yahoogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Pyramid Pick

Dundjinni

Published by [Fluid Entertainment](#)

\$39.95 for Macintosh or Windows PC; Additional Art Packs \$4.95-\$14.95

Requires Java 1.4 or higher

Windows 98 or Mac OSX

800 MHz Pentium 3

256 MB RAM

85 MB hard disk space (more is better)

Uses PNG file format for importing art objects

Exports output to HTML or proprietary DJA adventure files

Imports XML *d20 System* character information from e-tools

A color printer will be needed for optimum quality output

When I saw the art samples from the ***Dundjinni*** website I may have actually drooled on my keyboard. I am a long time gamer, and have long wanted software to make my life as a GM and player easier. This has led to me to buy several versions of ***Campaign Cartographer***, various character generators including e-tools, and to spend ridiculous amounts of time making spreadsheet tools to "automate" character creation for various games. This has been a hit and miss effort because many of these programs didn't perform as they were supposed to, or the learning curve on the products was too steep for my patience.

Dundjinni is mapping software with the ability to make beautiful and functional maps quickly and easily. The maps are rendered bitmaps, not the CAD-like isometric drawings from other mapping programs. The printed output from these maps is comparable to the tiles from ***Cardboard Heroes***, and if you have a good color printer and some cardstock paper you can make detailed maps suitable for miniatures combat in just a few minutes.

The map creation process is simple. ***Dundjinni*** starts with a blank canvas, and then you add the art using paint tools that will be familiar to most computer artists. Floors and walls have textures to choose from such as rock, dirt, clay, and wood. Objects such as chairs, torches, ropes, traps, treasure, and weapons can be pasted onto the map with the stamp tool. Special cover effects such as fog, smoke, and magical sparkles can be pasted onto the map to enhance the appearance. On top of this you can place optional hex or square grid markings.

Printed maps default to a scale of ¼ inch = five feet. This means a very large map can be printed on an 8.5×11-inch piece of paper. Any section of this map can be selected and printed as a "battle map." The battle map will print to a scale of one inch = five feet. This works very nicely with miniatures and which elements of the map you wish to print (floor, walls, doors, etc . . .) can be selected prior to printing.

These map design features are very intuitive, and the program comes with a Dungeon art pack which allows for a very detailed dungeon to be created. Additional art packs are available from the ***Dundjinni*** website with prices ranging from \$4.95 to \$14.95, with bundle discounts available on some sets. There is also a vibrant and active user community which provides hundreds of free art objects which can be used with ***Dundjinni***. Furthermore, the program recognizes the PNG file format which allows the user to make or import many additional objects.

As a mapping program, ***Dundjinni*** is very good. But I was surprised to discover that it also will easily turn a map into a fully realized adventure module. If you are running a ***d20 System***-based fantasy game and make your own maps, this software can save hours of time in creating an adventure. The program comes with more than 100 pieces of art, and many more are available from the user groups or from art packs sold at the Dundjinni web store.

Every object you place in a map can be right-clicked on and given a description. For example, you can place a rope and write in the description, "This is a magical rope that will add +5 to climb checks." By placing special room key objects into your dungeon rooms (areas separated by walls are rooms) the program will take an inventory of every object in the room. **Dundjinni** also comes with the ability to add monsters and includes many of the basic monsters from the **d20 System** complete with stats. Finally, the program can import characters, monsters, and NPCs from the e-tools program. The developers have also partnered with several game companies such as Reaper, and the program includes artwork from painted miniatures to assign to characters and NPCs.

All of these special objects (rooms, monsters, characters, and details) are recognized and assigned to the room in the map where they are located. A dialog window allows you to define the character hooks, background on the adventure, synopsis and any special notes for yourself and future GMs.

After you've placed all these objects, **Dundjinni** can print out your adventure. It comes with a cover sheet that details who made the adventure, and then it prints out a walkthrough of the dungeon complete with every item in the rooms, the stat-blocks for all monsters, and the stat-blocks for any characters. Special icons identify portions of the description to be read aloud. After this section come your maps, and finally a page prints with character counters to use as miniatures for the adventure.

I was able to figure out the basics of **Dundjinni** quickly from my experience using previous paint programs. The ability to create the adventures will require either reading the manual or following the tutorial which is available for download from their website. So far I think **Dundjinni** is the best RPG mapping program I've used, but like any software it isn't perfect.

There are a few caveats you should be aware of before buying **Dundjinni**. First, it is written in Java, and requires the download of the Java virtual machine. It will run with Java 1.4 or 1.5, but you will need to make sure that previous versions of Java have been uninstalled first.

The adventure creation program is extremely cool and fun to use, but is obviously geared towards **d20 System** fantasy. If you want to use it for another system the objects and maps will be great for you, but the character and NPC tools will be useless.

Finally, if you plan to run anything other than fantasy you will need to either be able to make your own art, or have some friends who do. **Dundjinni** has announced plans for a modern art pack, but it is not out yet and while the user community has provided some beautiful starting tools, there is a definite lack of modern and futuristic art available.

Overall, this program is wonderful. I'm not going to throw away my **Campaign Cartographer** or **Fractal Mapper** software yet, but the output from this program just blows them away for tactical mapping. Finally, the adventure creation tool is the best software GM helper I've seen.

--William Blake Smith

Pyramid Review

Machine Tractor Station Kharkov-37 (for *Call of Cthulhu*)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Bret Kramer

Illustrated by Mithras

Cartography by Brett Kramer

110-page tapebound b&w book; \$20.00

The 10th of Chaosium's answer to the PDF revolution, the Miskatonic University Library Association monograph, *Machine Tractor Station Kharkov-37*, takes the players deep into Stalinist Russia. Where previous visits to this era, "Sleigh Ride" in Chaosium's 1992 anthology, *Fearful Passages*, and "Secrets of the Kremlin" from T.O.M.E.'s 1984 *Glozel est Authentique*, allowed the players to visit the Soviet Union using their normal investigators, in *Machine Tractor Station Kharkov-37* they play members of the Soviet establishment. This is a one-off or tournament scenario, much in the mold of [No-Man's Land](#), but with strong nods to both the scenario "The Killer Out of Space" from *Cthulhu Now*, and "GRU Spetsialni Viedotstvo 8" (or GRU SV8) from Pagan Publishing's [Delta Green: Countdown](#).

[SPOILER ALERT]

It is March 1933 and contact has been lost with Machine Tractor Station Kharkov-37. Part of the collectivization program, it is the depot for the tractors and other equipment leased to the surrounding kolkhozes or collective farms. Output and production significantly increased for 1931, earning it both the Order of Lenin and a test dairy. The station has also attracted the attention of the OGPU (or United State Political Directorate, a precursor to the KGB), and once contact has been lost with both the station and the OGPU team, the GRU (the Soviet Union's military intelligence) likewise take an interest. The SV8 was established to keep an eye on the special projects handled by the OGPU for Stalin, in case they turn out to be a threat to the USSR. Operating undercover as members of TASS, the Soviet Union's Telegraph Agency, a trio of GRU agents is assigned to investigate, but first they must collect both supplies and troops from Red Army Supply Depot 945.

This scenario is designed for exactly six players, who will take the roles of the three GRU agents and the commanding officer of Red Army depot 945, its doctor, and its political commissar. With twenty troops in tow, the convoy makes its way to the Station to discover a scene that is much a dustbowl as it is a snowfield. The inhabitants and livestock are all missing. The Station and its environs are all strangely desolate and lifeless . . .

What lies ahead is a strangely bleak mystery. Although the players are unaware of it, there is a deadline built into the scenario. The likelihood is that they will be too busy investigating the situation. And there are a lot of clues to look into, perhaps too many. Not only do the characters have to contend with the investigation and the cause of the mystery, there is another source of tension built into the scenario. This is between the two factions of the character party, the soldiers against the GRU agents. The latter of course, have access to more information, and it is suggested that the Keeper prepare appropriately decorated folders for each of the pregenerated characters. A nice touch is the effort made to make the orders for the GRU characters look like one-time cipher pads, a secondary result being that the orders are actually difficult to read from a distance.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The actual advice for the Keeper is best described as short, but thankfully it is to the point, and the scenario could not exactly be described as being either lengthy or complex. Instead there is a stark and dangerous simplicity to ***Machine Tractor Station Kharkov-37*** that leaves plenty of room for the players to get into character and roleplay. What the players should relish is the atmosphere the scenario encourages: Party paranoia and distrust against an increasingly desperate situation.

In terms of production, ***Machine Tractor Station Kharkov-37*** is better than many of the other MULA monographs. What few problems there are -- the slightly off index and the blandness of many of the handouts -- cannot be described as being debilitating or distracting. Subsequent printings should see them fixed anyway. The maps are bland though serviceable, and the book is nicely illustrated with a selection of Stalinist-era posters that will look good if the book sees proper publication and distribution. With luck, when that happens, Chaosium will adhere to Soviet chic for its look, as its current house style of the faux manuscript would be the book's ruin.

Some might complain at the set number of players and the fact that they are all male. Neither problem is addressed, and perhaps it might be in subsequent printings or a full publication. Others might find fault that it is another one-off affair, but it does offer a fresh look at a previously used threat *and* in some way gives a much more simple and fresh take upon the game than many of Chaosium's recent releases.

Ultimately, this is not a scenario that can be run with any ease, but that it is a one-off affair means that its near no-win situation is both far more atmospheric and effective. By setting it in the Soviet Union, ***Machine Tractor Station Kharkov-37*** brings a fresh approach to encountering the Mythos and it should provide an experience to remember.

--Matthew Pook



Palace of the Queen of the Mist Elves

by Matt Riggsby

Caerceol is a secluded castle imbued with powerful, if largely passive, magic. This setting is appropriate for traditional fantasy settings and is amenable to a broad range of modifications to fit an existing campaign.

History

Caerceol is the centuries-old seat of power of the Mist Elves, a reclusive faction of elvenkind living in a region of forested highlands. A legendary warrior queen, exiled from her home, and her followers carved a country out of a no-man's-land inhabited by monsters and barbarians, and they settled down to rule it. Their palace was constructed by a quiet, misty lake.



From the beginning, the elves constituted a small ruling class over a mix of forest-dwelling elves, humans, and quasi-human creatures drawing a comfortable if unspectacular living from the forests and painstakingly cleared fields. The general population retains elements of higher civilization (for example, a significant minority of peasants are at least semi-literate), but their neighbors are mostly barbarian clans who raid at any opportunity, and the small kingdom is weeks' travel from the closest civilized land. Though diminished in numbers and power, the mist elves maintain their defense of the realm and the remnants of their ancient culture. The center of that culture is Caerceol. In its libraries, furnishings, and court rituals are preserved the glories of days past and the traditions of an ancient people.

The Approach

The kingdom is liberally wooded, and Caerceol is surrounded on its landward sides by six miles of thick forest. The woods themselves are magical: even if characters employ an army of woodsmen to cut down the forest, the distance from the edge of the woods to the castle remains the same. The region is also always wrapped in light mist, cutting visibility down to a half mile at most if you can climb above the trees; down among the trees, you're lucky to see 20 yards. The occupants of Caerceol have little use for roads, and there are no easily discerned paths through the woods. Between the thickness of the woods and the all-encompassing mist, it's easy to get lost. To anybody but an experienced woodsman or a lifelong resident, each dripping, moss-encrusted tree looks like another. There are, however, a number of rune-inscribed standing stones pointing the way. Characters without a guide or a good sense of direction may spend days wandering through the woods, but they'll find the castle sooner or later.

Caerceol also overlooks a misty lake. A few small islands, hardly more than mossy rocks with a few trees on their steep sides, are visible from the shore. None are permanently inhabited, although occupants of Caerceol may sometimes steal away to them for a bit of privacy.

The Site

Caerceol is set on a roughly triangular hill bordered by a stream and the lake. The stream isn't wide (no more than 10 yards), but fast, cold, and too deep to wade. It broadens into a small reedy delta as it pours into the lake. Main access to the castle is a stone bridge across the stream. The water-ward sides are also the steepest sides of the mound. In fact, the curtain wall is over 30 feet tall along the lake face, but because the land behind is much higher, it only rises about four feet above the surface on the lawn inside. The third and narrowest side faces the forest. While the sides of the mound on the stream and lake sides have been kept relatively clear, the forest comes nearly up to the landward wall, with a gap of only a few feet of rough lawn between the wall and the woods.

The hill is partly artificial. The castle incorporates remains of the foundations of at least two earlier fortifications, and all lie atop an older earthen mound. Legend holds it to be the remains of an even older fortress or the burial mound of the first queen.

The Walls and Garden

The curtain wall is made of roughly squared-off stones, dark with age and decked with ivy and lichen. The workmanship, though, is solid. The wall is fortified with several towers and encloses the keep and a well-tended lawn/garden. Letters indicate locations on the overhead view. Numbers indicate locations on the interior floor plans. 

River gate (A): The river gate consists of a gatehouse on the far side of the stream, a stone bridge, and a second gatehouse at the curtain wall. Each gatehouse includes two narrow towers and a parapet over the gateway. The doors, usually closed but not barred, are heavy wood bound with black iron. Each gatehouse is manned by two or three sentries, although the terrain renders a lookout somewhat futile. The guards reside in the upper levels.

Boat tower (B): Near the point where stream meets lake, this "tower" is really a raised parapet atop a small gallery along the wall. The gallery consists of three small rooms for storage space and pallets for the guards. It has arrow slits facing both inward and outward, and the door can be barred for independent defense in case the wall is overrun. It also has an outward-facing door about fifteen feet above ground level. The doorway lets out onto a set of wooden steps descending to the lakeshore near a stone boathouse and dock. Most of the palace's daily supplies are brought from villages along the lake to the dock and are carried up through the boat tower.

Far post (C): The far post, at the other lake-facing point of the triangle, gets its name from being the fortification farthest from the keep. It is simply a small tower just taller than the wall, containing a small room.

Kitchen gate (D): The kitchen gate, along the second land-facing side of the triangle, gets its name from being the gate through which fresh game is usually brought from the outside. It is a gatehouse similar to those by the stream.

Small post (E): The small post, at the third point of the triangle, resembles the far post but is slightly smaller.

Garden (F): The garden (Americans would call it a lawn) is mostly well-tended grass, but in season, there are beds of flowers near the Great Room and patches of herbs by the kitchen entrance.

Groaning Well (G): Known locally simply as "the well," the Groaning Well is just a water source for most of the year: a wide stone-lined well of unknown depth. During the storms of winter, however, it produces a "voice" of groans and low booming noises. During those times, everyone avoids the well, except for the queen, who will stand by it for hours at a time in something approaching a trance. It is believed that the voice of the well will give her oracular insight and advice. The ordeal, though, is harrowing; a number of older queens have died by the well.

Grove (H): The grove is a stand of ancient trees near the far post. It is the only part of the garden which is not carefully cultivated. The densely set trees are a remnant of the forest's ancient days and are said to go back to the beginning of the world. Rumor has it that the grove is a magical portal; anyone who can squeeze between the intertwined branches can make their way to any other part of the ancient forest which remains wooded. The leaves, bark, and other parts of the trees are used for healing and magical purposes, but few attempt to enter the grove for fear of bad luck (the gardener is scrupulous about cutting the grass up to the grove but not touching the trees).

Basement

This level is semi-subterranean; it's actually all under ground level, but a narrow ditch around the castle exposes a few high windows. 

Catacombs (B.1): The original design of the catacombs was a square chamber adjoining four apses, each with shelf-like niches. However, chambers have been added as more room became necessary. Queens and highly honored individuals have been laid to rest here for untold centuries. As a result, the shelves are crowded with bones and tattered remnants of once-fine burial shrouds. Every niche has at least a few bones, but as new spaces are needed, they are moved to other niches that still have room. If it became necessary, it might be difficult to find the bones of a specific individual. The catacombs are dark (no windows) and cramped, but surprisingly dry.

Kitchens (B.2): This is really a complex of rooms: two kitchens; a pantry for dry items; a buttery for casks of liquids; a wine cellar, with a locked door whose key is held by the major-domo; and a warren of small store rooms. The kitchens are cavernous, noisy, and busy from before dawn to sundown. They're lit partly by sunlight through the high windows and (in suitable weather) the open door, but mostly by cooking fires.

Servants' quarters (B.3): This is where the downstairs servants live. This includes the kitchen staff including the head cook, the gardener, the gamekeeper, and their assistants. The junior staff sleep on pallets in relatively large, clammy dormitories. The more senior staff have cramped rooms to themselves.

Ground Floor

 This level contains mostly public or semi-public rooms, such as assembly and dining halls. Except where noted, floors are hard wood with occasional carpets, walls are covered with dark wood panels carved here and there in forest motifs or with grotesque faces, and the windows are arrow slits.

Great Room (1.1): If Caerceol has a throne room, it is the Great Room. It is here that the most important visitors are received, new laws proclaimed, and the highest business of state carried on. The walls are nearly thirty feet high, rising to a vaulted ceiling. Dark wood paneling alternates with high, narrow windows made from small panes of leaded glass.

Chapel (1.2): The chapel is a white marble-paneled shrine used for the private devotions of the queen and her inner circle. Compared to the opulence of the rest of the palace, the chapel is almost austere, with subdued geometric motifs carved into the marble panels. The room is windowless, lit by candelabras distributed liberally around the room. Behind an altar is a trap door covering the stairs to the catacombs.

Secret Garden (1.3): The existence of the garden is no secret, but its contents are well-hidden. Hardly more than an air shaft, the garden is filled with shade-loving plants and a few bits of stone furniture. It is the exclusive retreat of the queen. Only the gardener can come there at will, and the queen rarely brings visitors with her.

Inner court (1.4): The inner court is used for semi-private audiences and conferences. If there's a war to fight, its strategy will be plotted out here. There are a number of small writing desks, at which senior clerks and ministers can often be found, but few decorations or luxuries.

Banquet room (1.5): Permanently set with tables, this room is used for large feasts drawing nobles from across the queen's realm and notable visitors from abroad. The room is only partly encompassed by walls. On some of its sides, it is bounded by a row of carved wooden pillars with curtains hanging between them. There is a small spiral staircase at one side leading down to the kitchen and up to the higher floors.

Drawing room (1.6) and Lower Gallery (1.7): These rooms are typically used for casual audiences, private performances by entertainers, and relaxation. They are among the best decorated rooms in the castle, with thick carpet, paintings along most of the walls, and rich but comfortable furniture. They are also the best lit, with an entire wall

Secret Passages

There are no secret doors or passageways marked on the map. If they were on the map, they wouldn't be secret, would they? However, you can add them as you desire. Arrases and wall panels can hide secret doors, and the walls can have passages (many are three to four feet thick and could easily contain cramped but passable hallways). If the campaign involves intrigue, they'll be completely secret. However, they may simply be ignored by the residents, giving the servants a way to move about without being seen.

taken up by tall, narrow windows as in the Great Room.

Guard room (1.8): This room is so called because by tradition there are always guards stationed there. It serves more generally as a reception room for visitors coming in or leaving by the river gate. The room is two stories tall, with a balcony around the room at second floor-level.

Grand Stairs (1.9): This large, circular staircase, built around a thick central pillar, connects the first three floors. The pillars around it support the high tower.

Outer Courts (1.10): The Outer Court is where much of the day to day business of governance is carried on. There are many small desks distributed around the room, usually occupied by scribes dealing with correspondence, and the large niches between pillars can serve as offices or meeting areas.

Keep Yard (1.11): The Keep Yard is a small open area surrounded by the castle walls, with the doorway to the outer court on one side a gate outside on the other. Because of traffic in and out, the gate is almost always open.

Private Stables (1.12): Although Caerceol's main stables are outside the walls, there are a few stalls for mounts and a shelter for carriages on either side of the Keep Yard. They are usually kept partly empty should unexpected visitors need their use.

Second Floor

This level contains more private areas, such as apartments for the aristocratic residents and their guests. Décor is much like the first floor, but windows are somewhat wider.

Queen's rooms (2.1): The Queen's apartments are, of course, the most comfortable in the palace. They consist of inner and outer sitting rooms, dressing room, bed chamber, maid's room, and solar. The queen has covered the paneled walls with tapestries of battle scenes. By tradition, if the queen's consort dies, the solar's broad windows are covered with black curtains which are never drawn until a new queen is crowned. 

Open Gallery (2.2): The open gallery, connecting with the balconies overlooking the great room and guard room, is a waiting area, semi-formal meeting place, and, in times of crisis, overflow work space for keeping the queen's advisors close at hand. It is liberally furnished with comfortable chairs and small tables and desks. The room is as close as many people get to the Queen's apartments.

Pillared Gallery (2.3): This is a trophy room, adorned with armor, weapons, and other relics of Caerceol's past. Every queen has hung at least a few items from the room's many columns, although it would take a thorough search of the library to determine the significance of all of them.

Clerestory (2.4): The clerestory is a semi-open walkway with a waist-high parapet above the drawing room. In particularly bad weather, servants install cloth canopies for shelter.

Apartments (2.5): Most of these rooms for residents and important visitors consist of a bed chamber and a sitting room, but others are more elaborate. Each has its own name and history. Some of the names derive from their décor or function. For example, the grand and small state rooms are usually reserved for important visitors, while the sea rooms are painted blue and green with ornaments in the shape of fish and ships. Others have names of more obscure derivation. The cold rooms once suffered from a draft, fixed decades ago, while the music rooms were once used as a conservatory. The origins of some of the names, such as the dragon rooms and the doctor's rooms, are lost in time, or at least in dispute.

Upper Floors

These floors are mostly given over to more servants' quarters and a few special purpose rooms. Walls are whitewashed stone; floors are wooden planks.



Servant's Quarters (3.1): The upstairs servants live, naturally, upstairs. They aren't dark and clammy like the downstairs quarters; they're uncomfortable in their own way. They are better lit, but stuffy and dusty. Again, junior servants live in segregated dormitories, while senior servants have tiny private rooms. The major-domo has a large office, which is packed with account books.

Storage (3.2): The upstairs storerooms hold furniture not currently in use, rolled-up tapestries and carpets, broken items of all kinds awaiting repair, summer bedding in winter, winter bedding in summer, cleaning tools, and other odds and ends, all covered in dusty cloths and packed into a maze of long, narrow rooms.

Library (3.3): The so-called library is half museum, containing trophies and mementos of queens past as well as original copies of proclamations (sometimes borrowed by the chancery of the Outer Court), letters, monographs of court wizards, and other texts. The court wizard traditionally serves as librarian, and each imposes his own order on it, doing so in his own good time. As a result, he's usually the only one who can find anything.

Clock tower (3.4): Although the top of this tower serves as an auxiliary watch station, the interior is taken up by the gears and weights of a large clock. The secrets of its manufacture are long lost (or, at least, well-hidden), but the servants have passed down through the generations knowledge of how to clean the gears, reset the falling weights which power it, and reset the time (it typically loses five to ten minutes a day). It is a great curiosity and has fascinated residents for generations.

High tower (not on floor plans; above the Grand Stairs): The high tower is the province of the guards. It contains an armory and storeroom, a rarely-used office for the Champion, and a common room and quarters for the guards themselves.

Stable and Kennel

Although the castle has a small set of stables, Caerceol's main stables are outside the walls. They have stabling for about twenty horses as well as kennels for hunting dogs. Caerceol's dogs are a cross between the highly bred hounds brought by the first queen's followers and the wolves which once prowled the woods in large numbers but now prove elusive. The Caerceol dogs are large, shaggy beasts who appear intimidating but are surprisingly friendly and extremely loyal. They can occasionally be seen in the castle itself.

Residents

Life at Caerceol revolves around Queen Tanalta. Tanalta is what one would expect of a vigorous monarch. She seems at an indeterminate age beyond girlhood but before middle age, serious and reserved but not unkind, and firm but rarely forceful save in extremity. She is also in excellent physical condition (with good reason; the queen traditionally leads her people in battle) as well as strikingly attractive, with dark eyes and long, raven-black hair, both of which are unusual for her people. At the moment, Tanalta is unmarried, but she is expected to take a consort at least once in her life to produce an heir (the crown descends on the eldest daughter).

There are, however, a number of officials and hangers-on resident at the castle at any time. Several of the queen's cousins and close friends attend her needs and run official errands (the palace servants typically come into contact with her only to do the dirty work of cleaning and carrying).

The highest official in residence is the Minister of the Purse, the venerable Siobad. Siobad, who served Tanalta's mother and grandmother in the same capacity, is old even for an elf; his lean, lined face (and often imperceptibly slow movement) makes him look a bit like an extremely well-preserved

Consort's Curse

The "at least once" is a problem. The position of consort is one of great prestige, but it's widely regarded as cursed. No consort in recent memory has lived more than six years after marrying the

mummy. The Chancellor, who oversees a body of clerks, is also in residence. The current Chancellor is Dunciar, an energetic, driven man with an uncomfortably intense gaze.

queen.

The library is maintained by the wizard Lubiodon One-Hand. Lubiodon is rumored to have given his right hand in exchange for enormous power, but it is a matter he refuses to discuss. Lubiodon spends as much time as he can alone in the clock tower pursuing abstruse magical research. He rarely comes out unless summoned by the queen.

The final resident of note is the Champion, head of the queen's bodyguard. A new Champion is selected once every seven years from distinguished warriors through the realm. Candidates are subjected to intense examination and physical ordeals, so the Champion is a man of proven ability. Meldain, the current champion, is typical: loyal, sharp-eyed, clever, and very, very dangerous. Meldain had suffered some embarrassing reverses early in his battlefield career, so he was doubly grateful to the queen for the chance to prove himself.

Servants

The division between aristocratic residents and their servants is mirrored by a division in species. The residents are cultured, educated elves of long lineages. The servants are a mix of half-elves, humans, and off-breeds of faerie. There's an additional division between the "upstairs" servants, who look after the interior of the palace and the moment-to-moment comfort of the residents, and the "downstairs" servants, who cook and look after the outside.

Tulan, the major-domo, is the ultimate authority over the household. He spends most of his time personally looking after the chief residents, but manages to find time to criticize or, occasionally, praise the staff. Quiet and finicky, Tulan is notoriously difficult to read. Even his race and age are anybody's guess; his delicate-featured face is nearly unlined, but what little hair he has left is quite white.

Immediately subordinate to the major-domo are the matron, chief cook, gardener, and gamekeeper. Of those, only Panulia, the matron, is upstairs. The matron's special area is the supervision of the female servants, but she lives up to her title by serving as a maternal figure for most of the palace's population, resident and servant alike.

Quedo, the quick-tempered chief cook, rules the kitchen staff with an iron fist, but he chafes under the authority of the major-domo and has an uneasy truce with the gardener and gamekeeper. Tulan and Quedo have quietly despised one another for decades, an arrangement which works well for everyone.

The gardener and gamekeeper are theoretically under Tulan's authority, but he rarely supervises them. Basbarro the gardener is an elderly man with apparent gnomish blood, but still quite spry, and his skill at tending the garden is legendary. He is a great favorite among the staff, always ready with an amusing story or song. He draws helpers as he pleases from the kitchen staff, much to Quedo's annoyance. Used to spending hours at a time stalking shy animals, Chullan the gamekeeper is as quiet as Basbarro is noisy. He isn't actively antisocial, but he has been observed going for days at a time without speaking.

The guards hold an intermediate position between the servants and the aristocratic residents. Usually seen rather than heard, they answer to the queen and her champion. The most important thing about the guards is that they are all formidable veteran warriors, selected for skill, bravery, and loyalty. There aren't many, but each is worth any number of regular men.

Caerceol in the Campaign

Caerceol offers many possibilities for adventure, and can be modified to fit different moods and situations. For example, although the residents are here called elves, they can just as easily be some other flavor of magically adept aristocrats, low-tech Tymbrimmi, or merely gloomy, reclusive humans. Here are just a few possibilities for modifications and adventures:

Mood options: As written, Caerceol is a quiet, even lonely place, appropriate as the last outpost of a dying race, where conflict is social and political rather physical. However, it could easily be the lofty center of a dark, moody, but still vigorous nation. In that case, replace some of the mist with thunder and storms and increase the traffic in and out. Bloody duels and torrid love affairs will be frequent distractions. Its relationship to PCs may also call for some modifications. The palace may serve as a refuge or allied stronghold (more lights, friendly inhabitants) or a prison or enemy stronghold (fewer carpets and tapestries, hostile inhabitants, shiftless servants).

Haunted option: Caerceol is unimaginably old, the grounds contain catacombs and two locations which house spirits, and the entire region is faintly magical. It would be surprising if it *weren't* haunted. Ghosts at Caerceol will be sufficiently unobtrusive that the castle can still be inhabited (unless you want to make it a crumbling ruin, which is a valid choice), but they may take a particular interest in the PCs. Do they want the PCs out, or will they keep the PCs from leaving? Are they trying to accomplish something, or keep a secret? Is there a connection with the permanent mists and forest, the catacombs, or the apparent curse on consorts? Ghosts and other secrets buried under the castle may also make Caerceol appropriate for Gothic or Cthulhuesque horror.

Mundane option: In a low-magic or historical campaign, Caerceol can keep much the same atmosphere while shorn of magical elements. Both servants and aristocrats can be human, but with a social division which may as well make them separate races. The mist may not be permanent, but the site may be prone to frequent fogs and overcast, giving it a gloomy look most of the year anyway. The well, the grove, and so on may not have magical powers, but it's certainly realistic that they be *believed* to have them.

But without the magical forest, Caerceol isn't well defended. The position on the water is good, but the walls are too low to withstand strong assault, and the windows facing the lake are too big. If used as presented, Caerceol is a noble retreat in a peaceful era. If conditions are more warlike, the large windows should go away and the walls should come up five to ten feet.

Adventure Seeds

Upstairs, Downstairs (the Steel Cage Death Match): There's no reason the warriors and aristocrats have to have all the ancient mysteries. The broom closets and kitchen stoves have their own stories to tell. This is one of them: Every time a new batch of soup stock is made at Caerceol, the remnants of any old batches are added to it. Those leftovers contain the remains of previous stocks, and so on back. Cooks in many societies reserve older stocks expressly to include in newer ones, since they create a richer, deeper flavor, a property which is subtly magnified with each successive batch. Some of these soup stocks can be traced through batches for decades or even longer. Caerceol's "mother stock" has a lineage that goes back for centuries, perhaps as far back to the first meal served when the castle was built. And now, on the eve of a feast in honor of the visit of a potential ally against the barbarians, the mother stock is missing. It is usually divided among four containers stored in different places, so no clumsy pot boy can break them all and destroy the precious essence. All four have vanished, and the kitchen staff faces the horror of having to present a substandard meal. Unless, of course, the PCs can save the day.

Marriage politics: This is not an adventure so much as a series of adventures. The need to produce an heir will, eventually, require the queen to marry. If there are no daughters, vicious dynastic wars involving the queen's sisters and nieces traditionally follow, a situation everyone would rather avoid. However, selection of a proper mate is a process fraught with political implications, and candidates may be reluctant to take the position. PCs might join one faction or another, each supporting their own favorite (mostly by working against the others), or even try to achieve the position themselves, counting on their own consummate abilities to protect themselves from a probably nonexistent curse. The situation is ripe for tragic romance as well. The queen may be torn between being with the man she loves and quite possibly dooming him by marrying him. She may marry someone she doesn't love to keep the one she does alive, opening the door for juicy scandal as they carry on a secret affair.

First Time For Everything

I remember when I first was talking with the previous *Pyramid* editor Scott Haring, shortly after I'd been handed the reins way back in February 2000. Given that my knowledge of the gaming industry was lacking, one of his pieces of advice he offered was that I should attend the GAMA Trade Show, the largest industry trade show in the states. (I hedge a bit there because I'm not counting Toy Fair and I'm sure there's a board game trade convention in Europe whose attendance numbers are measured in factorials with double-digit exponents.) Anyway, I agreed that it was important that I attend GTS some day, although I wasn't sure if I'd be able to get there immediately.

This past week I attended GTS for the first time. (At least, I assume I did, if all went according to plan; I'm writing this ahead of time. As an aside, it's disconcerting to look at a nonstop flight within the states that takes eight hours, because of the time zone shifts.) I'm sure I'll have lots to write about next week, but for now anything I'd scribe would be based on speculation.

Anyway, the past 12 months have seen a number of personal industry firsts, including my first front-cover-credit published product, my first GenCon attendance, and the first time meeting Ken Hite (who handed me a cryptic tube he recovered from a murdered Louvre curator). And that's not even counting the new car I got a couple of weeks ago -- my first-ever new vehicle.

So now, as I scramble to write this column a mere 90 minutes before I need to leave at 3 a.m. to fly to Vegas, I scramble to find a topic. And as I find myself running out of personal "firsts," I realize how significant and meaningful I find them.

Really, I think many good campaigns -- especially those that have fantastic elements to them -- are often chalk-full of "never happens," "rarely happens," and "is about to happens." Each one of them suggests a story or adventure unto themselves: In a Steampunk game, who will be the first person to circle the globe in 75 days (besting the previous record holder)? Who will be the first to climb to the top of Mount Cheesehead? Who will be the one to marry the long-eligible Emperor?

In my spare moments lately, I've been playing a little game I lovingly call *The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap*. This game, like many previous Zelda games, has plenty of "firsts" that are laid out pretty early on:

- "Legend has it that if this bell rings, something amazing will happen . . ."
- "This portal to another world only opens every 100 years . . . and it's been almost 100 years!"
- "If lots of people actually buy games from Nintendo, maybe they can extract themselves from the industry-loss quagmire they've managed to sink to!"

Okay; that last one is the realm of pure fantasy. But the fact remains that the game does a good job of presenting plot points that could take a loooong time (game-wise) to resolve. More importantly, the game also introduces *new* awaited surprises as old ones are resolved. This is one of the points that real life doesn't deliver on much. In early life, there's the thrills of reaching various age milestones: getting to drive; getting to smoke/buy lottery tickets/porn; getting to buy booze; getting to rent a car. Then, after around 30 or so, the milestones stop, and soon you're just waiting to retire. Then you die, clutching your chest in your rented car while lighting a cigarette with a losing lottery ticket after finishing up with the porn.

Of course, in the gaming world, such surprise "firsts" are really only interesting if they have some kind of payoff. More importantly (in my opinion), these payoffs should have something to do with the gaming group; many games with rich metaplots are guilty of establishing cool "might soon happen" plot seeds, only to have their own characters steal the thunder of any possible PC accomplishments.

But if games maintain a steady flow of neat, new, and interesting events -- which, ideally, involve the PCs in some way -- then it's a hook that never grows old.

And if you'll excuse me, I now need to dash off to the airport, where my 23-hour day continues apace with little sign of stopping. And this could be the first time I've driven to the airport without sleep . . .

* * *

Speaking of GTS, I've been completely away from the computer for almost a week by the time you read this. So if you've written me earlier in the week, or burned my picture in effigy on the [discussion boards](#), please note that it might take a few days to get back to you. Thank you for your patience.

--*Steven Marsh*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Pyramid Review

The World's Largest Dungeon (for d20 System)

Published by [Alderac Entertainment Group](#)

Written by John Zinzer, Michael Hammes, Chris Burns, jim pinto, Jeff Stolt, Richard Farrese, Robert J. Schwalb, Lee Hammock, Jennifer Baughman, Mark Carroll, Jeff Dohm, Patrick Kapera, Dana DeVries, Ari Marmell, Jeff Ibach, Alexander Freed, Sean Holland, Kevin Millard, Aaron Rosenberg, & F. Wesley Schneider Edited by jim pinto & Katie Yates

Illustrated by William O'Connor & Cris Dornaus

840-page b&w hardcover plus 16 full-color 17" x 22" maps; \$99.95

Whew. Here goes.

Alderac Entertainment Group's magnum opus, *The World's Largest Dungeon*, is nothing if not ambitious. An 800-page monster, it's the biggest game adventure ever published. But at a nickel shy of a triple-digit price tag, is it worth it?

In a nutshell, the dungeon was created as a prison in which to place the many evil creatures who roamed the planet before the rise of Man. The powers of good and evil struck a bargain for the incarceration of some of these beasts, while others were just captured and manhandled into place. But a massive earthquake rocked the dungeon, and now enormous sections have been rent asunder. A mighty flow of lava cuts many sections (called Regions) of the structure in two. While this has not allowed the things within to get out, it has permitted those outside to find and enter the dungeon. The interior is now a motley collection of those who were imprisoned here and those who came in search of power, treasure, or adventure and are as trapped as the intended inmates. Communities large and small have sprung up as everyone tries to escape or attempts to consolidate the power they have. Politicking and attacks are common, and the party has to contend with these as they search for the way out . . . and perhaps the true nature of the dungeon.

Though grand in scale, the book turns out to be little more than a gimmick. Yes, the narrative pieces interlock pretty well, and the maps are gorgeous, all 35-plus square feet of them. But essentially what you have here is a collection of more than a dozen connected adventure modules, and few of them really distinguish themselves. It's almost halfway through the book before the adventures show real roleplaying potential should you wish to talk your way out of things.

The first third or so of the book is in need of serious editing. It may just be that there are plenty of spelling and grammar errors (though a few are worth a chuckle . . . a "goat of flame" erupts?), but it begs the question: How many mistakes found their way into the more critical parts of the manuscript? And since the goat erupts more than once, there's probably cutting and pasting that could be perpetuating things. A *lot* of cutting and pasting . . .

On the plus side, you have all the facts and figures you need on each monster or NPC. In the negative column, when you finish facing six orcs in room one, room two has six more orcs, and their stats are presented there as well, even if the two encounters are listed on the same page. Not that the two groups are identical, but no attempt at streamlining has been made, listing a monster here and then listing another of its species on the facing page with a simple "See

previous page, but raise the hp to 12 and remove the enchanted glaive." Embedding the stats in the text is better than a lot of page flipping (the less flipping with this tome, the better), but make no mistake, you're paying for a lot of duplicate text that might have been shoved into a perforated reference sheet for each Region or something.

Along the same lines, sometimes the influence of someone or something colors a whole area. One such beast sits at the center of his Region and may see the party almost anywhere therein, so his Spot skill and reactions are given *at the start of almost every encounter*. And how unlikely is it no team member will be spotted when they must make at least one check for each of the more than 70 encounters? How long before the creature spots you, attacks you, (presumably) dies, and renders several dozen paragraphs useless? Specifics were excluded from the chapter's introduction, but it appears in at least one subsection (where the random encounter table for that segment is given). Then the encounters continue listing it again and again.

And players had better enjoy the roleplaying opportunities, because there's not much puzzle-solving involved. Oh, sure, you can't chuck a six-sider down a 10' by 10' corridor without setting off half a dozen traps, and the rogues will be doing a booming business with Disable Device and Open Lock checks. But these are almost exclusively "Find and deactivate it, or suffer" -- you won't spend much time figuring out logic puzzles or trying to answer riddles, just tossing dice to see if another slab of rock crushes the cleric. Some forms of magic are disallowed to prevent munchkins from busting the dungeon, and level advancement is done by the Region (there are enemies enough to surge up in levels several times each Region -- see below for more problems this engenders). By the time you get to the "end," there's a buildup for what they bill as *the* big encounter, and once finished . . . you find out you still have another Region left to explore. You do have the option of ending things without going on, but who's going to go to this much trouble and expense, and not enjoy the World's Largest Denouement?

We're promised all the critters from the OGL, and they cheerfully admit that's not strictly true in their introduction. In spite of the marketing obstacles, in many ways this is good -- you're not fighting dinosaurs in alphabetical order. But while they contend readers won't want to see one of every dragon type, they aren't shy about using a lot of the same creatures on any one level.

The Region, subsection, encounter pattern leaves us at particulars. Each encounter will tell you if there are traps, who's in the room, what their strategy is in a fight, their treasure, and scaling. This last item lets the DM up the ante or relax the pace, depending on how the party has been doing. If they're still bleeding like stuck pigs from the minotaur battle, you can remove a dire wolf or two. This format gives us a fat, sturdy book (and a case of Stephen King Wrist), and if you're wondering, the margins are small and the type is even smaller. Regardless of the content's quality, you *are* getting over 800 solid pages of material.

The maps are first-class pieces of cartography, full-color (though many of them are just the regular brown and tan with flourishes added here and there, there are a few with stark-blue waters, bright-red lava flows, magical effects, etc.), and lock together nicely. If there's a problem with them, it's how much the referee has to keep up with. The book does what it can, using a "master map" to show how they hook together and even which sections are keyed to what character levels. This means if the DM doesn't take steps to prevent characters from wandering down the wrong connecting corridor, they could find themselves suddenly facing creatures geared toward PCs four levels stronger than the party currently is. And since the master map tells you how the characters should be advanced ("levels one to three in this Region"), you'd think there would be more help about to when to allow these advances. The master map labels character classes through 20th level, but the end of the book suggests, perhaps playfully, you ought to be 30th level. And the last, Region O, calls itself Region P . . . the editing woes continue.

The World's Largest Dungeon will be giving way to a sequel, ***The World's Largest City***. While the dungeon has many good points, and is an admirable achievement, its practical value is overshadowed by its practical problems and the loose threads that such a scale seems to inevitably leave hanging. Great effort has been put into making it a coherent whole, but the work simply overwhelms its creators. Only if you're looking to buy 15 adventures in bulk and six bucks a pop represents a substantial savings by volume -- or you just want it as a status symbol -- is such a gargantuan effort worth your while.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Roma Imperious: Alternate World History

Published by [HinterWelt Enterprises](#)

Written by William Corrie III

Cover by S. A. Skinner

Illustrated by Mark Roman, Jesus Carmona Esteban, Javier Carmona Esteban, Terry Pavlet, Eric Pommer, Erik Roman, S. A. Skinner, & Grey Thornberry

Cartography by Clayton Bunce

338-page b&w hardcover; \$39.99

All of a sudden the gamer has lots of choice when it comes to Rome-set RPGs, whether the exquisite [FVLMINATA: Armed With Lightning](#), the solid *GURPS: Imperial Rome*, the Mythos-instilled Cthulhu Invictus, or the quick and simple *1PG* from Deep7, [Pax Gladii -- Epic Swords & Sandals Adventure](#). The addition to the range is HinterWelt Enterprise's *Roma Imperious: Alternate World History*, which shares comparisons with *FVLMINATA* in that it projects Rome into a future where magic is prevalent and firearms known. But where *FVLMINATA* plays it straight, *Roma Imperious* radically increases the arcane quotient, adding combined doses of Gary Gygax and Ray Harryhausen-style fantasy.

The year is 1461 A.U.C. or 708 A.D. Rome has expanded its borders West into Hibernia, North to encompass Germania, South in North Africa to the borders of Ghana and Abyssinia, and East to the Kushan Empire of the Indian sub-continent and the powerful jade Empire rules from China. In 1065, civil war in the Empire was ended when Constantine beat his opponent using the Celtic magic of the Druidic traditions. In the centuries since, this magic has been studied and assimilated, so that now the Emperor is expected to be a practitioner. Magic is also used to improve factory efficiency, but more importantly, it has been used to build the Imperial Gates and Motus Celer or teleport discs. The former, located in each prefecture's capital, allow the teleportation of troops or trade goods, while the Motus Celer transport just ten people and are used by Imperial or Senate messengers. And despite not long having put down a revolt of rogue magi, magic is very much part of Roman society.

On Rome's Northern border, the Baltic kingdom of Alkasas has turned to dark magic, while the people of Skandia have spread to Greenland and a colony in Ommerike. They are aided directly by their gods who walk among them. Rome and the Jade Empire vie for influence in Asia and India. Slightly more advanced than Rome in the fields of food production, chemistry, and seamanship, the Jade Empire controls and restricts magic use to potions and glyphs on scrolls. Other threats are more outré. The Black Alfar terrorize the North with violent acts; Dwarves migrating into Asia Minor are rumored to enjoy the taste of human flesh; and Giants rapaciously graze the land and have even been recruited in the Legions. The batrachian Homo Rana lurk in the rivers, hunting packs using their paralytic spray; the Terragena Alkasas are Alkasas' despised foot soldiers that eat their foes, grown by black magic; and Sciurus Giganteus are giant squirrels, pack animals capable of destroying whole villages. Worse still are the Manes Atrox or Devil Terrors, extra-dimensional horrors that possess men and beasts to commit evil acts.

Like other HinterWelt Enterprises, ***Roma Imperious*** employs its house Iridium System. This is a class and level system that divides its 25 character classes into four types -- Fighter, Intellectual, Performer, and Thief. The creation process is not complex, but is hampered by having the class descriptions 100 pages before an explanation of the process. The character types encompass Roman citizens and those of other nations -- legionaries and gladiators as well as noble Shih Warriors of the Jade Empire and Celtic Druids. All characters have a chance for spell use, though the spell using classes are the Artificer, the Druid, the Magus, the Oriental Monk, the Priest, and the Shaman. Interesting classes include the Courtesan and the Praetorian Guard, which serves as Rome's secret police, while the Imperial Guard or Palatini loyally protect the Emperor. Each class gives several skill levels, points to spend on weapon proficiencies, plus the character's own development points.

Iridium System magic falls into three types: spells magic organized into Realms and spell lists, the more freeform clerical magic, and the dedicated or Chi magic of the Orient. Magi and priests of Rome use the Realms system, while priests of other cultures draw their magic direct from various deities. Shamans recruit from the spirit realm, the spirits appearing as animals that will give a shaman certain abilities depending upon the species. The less structured nature of clerical and shaman magic will require careful monitoring by the GM. Monks expend personal Chi to power various abilities that vary depending upon the monk's order. For example, for the Buddhist this is Flight and Heal, and Endure and Speed for the Taoist monk.

The Iridium System mechanics employs all of the polyhedral dice across three different methods of resolution. The first, the Stat check, is a d20 roll against a core attribute, unless it is over 20, in which case, a d30 is rolled. The latter might be a simple solution, but it is a trifle unfair. Skill checks require percentile rolls, while combat checks are again a d20 roll, plus modifiers against a target's Defense value. The combat system allows for parrying, hit locations, blood loss, and critical hits. Armor reduces damage, while the Targeting skill (purchased per weapon) allows a player to hit specific locations. Fighter types have the highest chances of rolling criticals, otherwise such chances are quite low, but when rolled are deadly.

The setting for ***Roma Imperious*** is supported with a lot of background material on the expanded Empire of 1461 A.U.C. This takes in the culture, history, politics, and religion, including Rome's assimilation of the Celtic and Germanic faiths as well as the Greek and Parthian peoples. The various cults and colleges are also detailed. Each of the Empire's major provinces is covered, although a complete lack of information on Britannia is a serious omission given the fact that it was the source of Roman magic. Pleasing the other nations are not ignored, though they are not as extensively described, but do include character and campaign ideas for each as ready starting points. The book is rounded out with lists of general and magic items, and capped with an insignificant pair of pages of GM advice plus an adventure. "Murder in Roma" is a murder mystery that needs expanding, but one cannot help wishing to see a Roman adventure that was not another murder mystery.

Physically, ***Roma Imperious*** is a sturdy, cleanly presented hardback. It needs a polish in places, as the writing grows rougher the further you get into the book. The illustrations are quite decent, a mix of the public domain and pieces drawn specifically for the book. The maps are nicely drawn, although they cannot decide whether Londinium is on the Thames or somewhere in Cambridgeshire. Although the book could have been better organized into a more logical, user-friendlier fashion, the solid index does help to counter this.

Roma Imperious is a vast improvement over the publisher's previous RPG, ***Shades of Earth***, which could be best described as a burnt microwave meal . . . Bland on the outside, blackened, bitter, and tasting of ashes on the inside. Fortunately, ***Roma Imperious*** is richer, broader in scope, better realized, and more flavorsome. True, the Iridium System feels very much like an effort to improve upon ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons***, but in ***Roma Imperious*** it feels far more appropriate, less intrusive than it might in a modern-set RPG. Despite the lack of GM advice, ***Roma Imperious*** is rife with possibilities, offering up swords, sorcery, and sandals in equal measure.

--Matthew Pook

BronzePunk

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

Author's Note: Unless otherwise noted, page references to **Basic**, **Fantasy**, and **Magic** are for **GURPS Fourth Edition**. All others are for Third Edition.

Infinite Worlds Info:

Name: Atlantis-3

Centrum Zone: Red

General TL: (1+6), with (1+9) bioengineering

The timeline known as Atlantis-3 has a more fluid tectonic plate system than Homeline, and thus has avoided the catastrophic effects of major earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Geological teams are nervously setting up sensors around [Krakatoa](#) and Mount St. Helens, which only show signs of long, slow events. The civilization of [Atlantis](#) exists, thrives in the east (see pp. AT26, 42, PM6, and Links below), preventing the rise of the [Roman Empire](#). One effect is that gladiatorial rings never became popular, although baths and aqueducts are. The lack of the Coliseum has slowed spectator sports, although teams still compete, and results are important.

Civilian Travel

The most popular civilian transport is called the "horseless chariot." Advanced flywheels power small intra-city models, while larger inter-city models use steam engines. Longer travel is typically made by boat, rail, or dirigible, depending on distance and cost. Railroad is less popular in areas where the land is unstable or populated by nomads, such as many parts of Egypt's domain, eastern "Greece," and western regions of "Atlantis" (see "Territory," below). Expensive dirigible airships and armed caravans may be the only options in these regions. In rural areas, where the roads are rough, [riding](#) is still popular. Civilian law enforcement vehicles sometimes have embedded sonic stun weapons that can be set on narrow beam for individual capture or wide beam for crowd control. Explorers today use combinations of zeppelins (equipped with solar-powered vapor electrolysis machines), ships (perhaps wind-powered vane clippers, p. CF126), and flying scouts (biomods or upgrades, see Templates, below) to chart the new world.

Military Vehicles

The militaries have their armed versions of the horseless chariot equipped with launchers for spears and LE grenades. Larger carriages called "death chariots" are often built around large weapons, such as cannons, screamers, or the rare Atlantean Light Cannon. Air vessels are primarily used as observation platforms from which to command the troops via heliograph or winged messenger. The rare artillery model "death barge" uses an onboard calculation engine to project trajectories for bombardment from behind cloudbanks. Navies float battleships that are virtually immune to anything a dirigible can sport. (At the GM's option, the dirigibles may be supplemented with a variant of the TL1 contragrav coating from p. VE41 which nullifies *half* the weight of the vehicle for the listed cost, or alternately, just the empty weight of the vehicle-not that of the fuel, cargo or passengers.)

The most anachronistic vehicle designs employed are called "death walkers" -- large battlesuits and mecha that use stone as an ablative outer armor. When at rest, these tanks can easily blend into local monument displays or landscape. The down side is that enemy artillery, saboteurs, and occupying forces will target any such stationary target, "just in case." Famous examples include the towering "The Wrath of Ramses II," (a.k.a. *Ozymandias*) and the quadruped [Sphinx](#). Both were pivotal in many conflicts, and while the former was eventually toppled in battle, in honor of the Sphinx's victories a casino was built [under it](#) when it was "retired."

Catapults and cannons above 400mm are common. Cannon ammunition used is typically solid shot, although armor-piercing shells with divisors up to (2) are available at 10× cost. Recent developments include shells that load and fire like ordinary armor piercing shells, but if they penetrate their target, they cause an effect similar to the spell "Earthquake." The effects of these "Quake" shells are as per *Severe* within 10 yards, *Mild* within 20 yards, and *Tiny* within 40 yards (see pp. M54, 3e M33).

Infantry Weapons

Due to the existence of a simple bullet resistant (only) lining (perhaps DR30 vs. bullets only, or similar to Venerian Rubber, p. STE116) that can be [worn under clothes](#) (TL1 & TL2), [classical weapons](#) and [unarmed combat](#) are still popular (see pp. EG87, GR77), although petty thugs still use cheap-quality pistols and zip-guns (see p. HT11). In addition to typical TL1 weapons, stunners and screamers (p. UT55) are common, but at 10× cost. In addition to regular fire lances (see p. F141), variants are available for 10× cost that inflict double damage and have double range. Atlantean light rifles (see p. STE20) can be found in elite military units around the world, as well as many regiments of the Atlantean forces. Full clockwork battlesuits (see p. STM76) are used in elite military units and hazardous environments while open-armor variants are common in construction areas. In addition to Orichalcum, the Atlanteans have a form of [terra cotta](#) battlesuit that is virtually immune to flame weapons (DR30 vs. flame-cost for appliqué as per advanced composite). Robot birds (see p. STE70) have their niche as observers (with cameras) or delivering covert messages. Completely mechanical horses (see pp. RO 119, STM75, STE83) are mainly toys for the rich, but can operate (or be stowed) in conditions that normal beasts could not.

The "Khopesh of Ra" (a.k.a. light sword, fire sword, sun sword, flame jet) (see pp. M73, 3e M38) is a favored weapon among warrior priests, many of whom believe that only their class is fit to wield it. It can be extended from one to 3 yards with a Ready action (see Force Sword for rules for duration, activation, mass, and cost on pp. B272, UT63). It is common for wielders to wear special flame-resistant heavy cloaks (see p. B287, 3e B242) (as a Very Fine cloak, but has DR20 vs. fire) in addition to bullet-resistant armor (above), although they are forbidden in some organized duels. A martial arts style could revolve around dodges and feints. Alternately, the GM may consider them as Force Swords for *all* purposes.

Power

The most popular form of energy storage are electrical capacitors (functionally like TL7 lead-acid batteries), and steampunk flywheels (10× capacity) (See pp. VE88, STM69, CF120). The most unusual power supply is the "ark furnace," which, when properly placed on an intersection of dragon/ley lines (see p. F45) (perhaps using Fortune Telling (Geomancy) skill), generates electric power. The configuration is so delicate that each small settlement will only have one. A traveler will often see the water tower built next to the power tower -- the "furnace" is harder to place than a well. They function similarly to a *beamed power receiver* (see p. VE87), but more like a *broadcast power receiver* (see p. STE45, but 50 lbs and \$100/kW). Mobile units must be more fault-tolerant, and are still in the experimental stages.

Other industrial energy sources come from hydrogen and oxygen created by electrolysis. The oxygen is used to fuel blast furnaces to allow faster baking of bricks, firing of pottery, distilling of glass, and barbecuing. The hydrogen is stored to fill/fuel passing dirigibles and/or power steam engines -- excess is sold locally. Thus a great number of villages and towns have four towers near their centers: water, power, oxygen, and hydrogen. The rising bubbles from the electrolysis process are often captured, spinning wheels to raise the water to fill the water tower.

Scientific Equipment

The orrery is a popular scientific tool for nobles to fund (see also p. F224). They are a welcome sight in the entry hall of many public buildings. There are even competitions to see who can build the most extravagant simulation of the heavens. Clear glass is so affordable that telescopes and binoculars are in the hands of ordinary people. Corrective lenses, on the other hand, are considered a form of mechanical cybernetics (see Biomods, below). The compass is a reliable invention but for reasons not yet understood, it does not function well *within* Atlantean submersibles or vehicles with contragrav coatings.

Computers are [clockwork](#) calculation engines (see pp. MIII24, STE65) that run programs from [discs](#) and papyrus-scrolls. These scrolls are a cross between tape, reel-to-reel, and punch cards. Its output display, composed of dozens of vertical wheels, may remind a traveler of a large slot machine. (Those found in local casinos have three to five wheels, often spelling words to win bonus prizes.) Low-resolution dot-matrix printers and "scroll punch" devices can write text, images, and more programs. This ability causes some to speculate that eventually they could program themselves (see Gordon Shumway's "Reign of Steam").

Architecture

Civil engineers of the day love "perfect" shapes and designs from nature and the heavens. As such, pyramids are memorial docks for airships! They also provide safe storage for hydrogen gas, as stone is heavy, fire resistant, and nonconductive. An Egyptian corporation has built a city in the desert of the Americas called "Las Vegas" -- built around a small sphinx mecha. It is a functional mech that has protected the city on a number of occasions, although the casino grounds seem to comprise most of the town's defense against invaders -- whole regiments have deserted, pawning their weapons to go gambling!

Home

A "flick" is a "book" that plays video and sound when placed in a player. "Flicks" can be made with a more expensive home "recorder," but most are rented from a store, or distributed by the state. People can also pick up "flicks" at news stands on the way home from work, and return them on the way to work to be recycled. Most "modern" homes have electric lights, appliances, and heating. Other home devices include the sonic screwdriver (see *sonic probe*, p. UT17) and a sonic shower (see p. UT27) for water conservation.

Governments

Egyptian

CR: 3

Colors: Gold and red.

Type: Monarchy.

"Real World" Home Territory: Africa, Western Middle East.

Advanced: Aeronautics, ark furnace, horseless chariot, hydroelectric power, and mega-engineering.

Trailing: Few railroads due to sand, naval power.

Export: Gold, silver, stone, solar power.

Import: Industrial metals.

Greece

CR: 2

Colors: Silver and tan.

Type: Democracy.

Things To Invent or Discover

- Helium
- Inertial Navigation Gyroscope
- Radio
- Stable "ark furnace" for traveling along ley-lines
- Stadiums with massive numbers of spectators
- Solar Mirror (see p. W:WW93) (improve agriculture in cold areas)
- Telegraph

"Real World" Home Territory: Europe, Western Russia.

Advanced: Biotech, clockwork prosthetics, medicine, vane clippers (see p. CF126), and wind power.

Trailing: Water-based power generation.

Export: Metals.

Import: Precious metals, power.

Atlantis

CR: 4

Colors: Blue/Crystal and green.

Government: Kingdom-wide monarch, provincial council, and local democracy.

"Real World" Home Territory: New Zealand to India to Korea, Oceania (see pp. AT25,42).

Advanced: Desalination mining, light beam weapons, OTEC power, refrigeration, shipbuilding, sonar, submarines, tidal power sources, torpedoes, and orichalcum, a bronze alloy as strong as steel (see pp. AT77, F23).

Trailing: Medicine.

Export: Crystal, seafood, ships.

Imports: Industrial metals.

Communications

Pneumatic tube systems connect all major office buildings within major cities. Heliographs (see p. VEXii15) are used as inexpensive communication devices.

Light semaphore towers (see pp. VEXii15, DWA10) can send messages at rates between 10 to 20 words per minute (depending on the average operator's skill), with an average relay latency of 10 seconds (to set the outgoing flags based on incoming). Popularly called "Light Towers," they are spaced 20 to 30 miles apart, and make good use of telescopes. The time to send a message is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Time} = \text{Length in Words} / \text{Speed in Words Per Minute} + \text{Latency}$$

where Latency = Number of Towers $\times$ delay per tower (typically 10 seconds or 0.6 minutes) or from the table below.

Example: Time = 100 words / 20 words per minute + 10 towers $\times$ 0.6 minutes
= 5 minutes + 6 minutes
= 11 minutes

One-way from	Distance	Latency Time
Cairo to Athens	700 miles	5 minutes
Athens to Bangkok	5,000 miles	33 minutes
Bangkok to Cairo	4,600 miles	31 minutes

The maximum one-way capitol-to-most-distant-province communication times are:

Realm	Farthest	Latency Time
Atlantis	2,400 miles	16 minutes
Egypt	4,600 miles	31 minutes
Greece	2,400 miles	16 minutes

Territory

The Egyptians control all of continental Africa and Madagascar, as well as much of the "Middle East," ruling from the seasonal palaces in Alexandria, [Cairo](#), Memphis, and Thebes (see pp. EG6-13). Holdings in "The New World" consist mainly of Central America and South-Eastern Canada, including the "Golden Horseshoe" around the Niagara Falls

power dam. They are currently building the Panama and Suez canals (see the Adventure Seeds, below). An extensive lock and power dam system over the many rapids (called "cataracts," p. EG7) on the Nile regulates the flow of water, preventing flooding. Thus the river is dredged frequently to allow for more shipping and to vitalize fields.

From Athens, the Greeks control Europe, Western Russia, and the Eastern seaboard of the United States. Its most northern inhabitants are completely adapted to their environment (see Biomods, below), and are progressively settling all the northern latitudes.

The Atlanteans control the lands from New Zealand to India, and north to Korea, as well as Oceania. It is ruled from the central location of [Bangkok](#). (The depreciated "Winter Palace" is in Tokyo.) In the New World, they control Alaska, the Northwest Passage under the ice, as well as Baffin Island. They have laid claim to [Antarctica](#), but have not yet been able to *overtly* exploit its resources. Speculation persists that once claims are finalized in "The New World" (a.k.a. the Americas), Antarctica will be the next contested region.

"Nomad Lands"

Between the large kingdoms exist unclaimed lands, "known" to be inhabited by "primitive" cultures that no one has decided to "civilize" yet. It is not well known that many border provinces choose to arm friendly neighboring tribes of "primitives" with more advanced weapons to keep wandering tribes or marauders (see p. EG28) from harassing the larger kingdom. This has the effect that when marauders win, or tribal allegiances change, the large province may have to contend with guerillas with dangerous weapons. They may be armed with anything from muskets to rifles to obsolete tanks.

At the GM's option, there may be entire kingdoms of comparable technology hidden in the unexplored regions of the map. Perhaps the [Maya](#) (see p. CF31), [Inca](#) (see p. CF30), and the Twenty Nations (see p. CF28) are still holding out against the foreigners. Historical candidates for "barbarians" include Babylonians, Germanic tribes, Gauls, Mongols, Picts, Saxons, and mixed ethnic pirates.

Biomods

Basic medicine is effectively TL (1+6), and there have been rapid breakthroughs in the field of bioengineering. Clockwork limbs (see p. CF123) and prosthetics are available in most cities, yet it is socially preferred to have a new limb grown than to wear an artificial one permanently. It is then a matter of debate as to whether it is better to have it be a pure clone, or if it is more chic to have it made with bear muscle and feline joint work. Biomods qualify for the same discount as per cyberwear -- obviously "alien" biomods are 1/5 the dollar price (see p. UTT95) (unless already in the description, such as cat's eyes or a tail). Gangs' "colors" are likely to include some sort of xenosculpting (see p. BIO64). There are many gangs whose "colors" also involve different biomods. E.g. Horns, claws, scales, tail(s), digitigrade posture, or extra limbs in addition to animal "features."

Greece encourages all citizens to get enhancements as they see fit and can afford them. Basic genefixing to prevent birth defects and hereditary germline improvements are subsidized by the state. Limb replacement and xeno-grafting are very fashionable in Egypt and Greece. It is a growing trend for tourists from more restrictive areas to have biomods implanted at the end of their trip and to recover on the way home.

Before being allowed to get biomods, Egyptians must get approval from a priest of a temple appropriate to the enhancement for anything other than basic genefixing and organ replacement. e.g. for night vision, Bast or Sekhmet (see pp. EG17, 112)

The Atlantean government is behind in most of these areas, with the exception of those involving aquatic modifications. It is said that a whole generation of *homo marinis* exist, forming undersea communities without the need to come up for air (see p. AT56). (It is up to the GM to decide if this is actually true!) Otherwise, genefixing is quietly encouraged, while anything more is discouraged. Non-human bioengineering is an art form here. A radical philosophical group is encouraging the "distilling" of mankind from the "animal within," encouraging germline

improvements such as increased IQ and Longevity.

There are many popular "breeds" of pets that are not found naturally in addition to those found on p. EG18. Some popular breeds include the cerberus (FB 17, GR 99), drake (DR56, FB83, B261), petty drake ("shoulder dragon") (DR54, FB92), griffin (CA 120, FB 28, B 145 3e), hippogriff (FB 30), huge lions (FB 47), pegasus (FB 52, GR 98), unicorns (F 49, FB 77), and the will-o-wisp (a tiny gas-filled bioluminescent life form). The larger the breed, the more expensive and rare they are. For template costs, see pp. R81, TS 118 and use TL10 prices..

If magical powers are available, magical implants such as [go-limbs](#) may be available, but would share the same stigma as clockwork limbs. Magic or superscience may have paths that lead to undeath -- the artificial animation of bodies. Whether the reanimated retain memories or will is another matter entirely.

Food

Atlantean food, when ordered at an "ethnic" restaurant, tends to be hot, spicy, and contains some kind of seafood and/or kelp. "Egyptian food" is notably smooth, despite that is made from preserved stock, and garnished with cool spices. Greek meals tend to contain lots of fresh vegetables and beans served with wine.

Physical Appearance

Egyptian: Taller.

Atlantean: Stouter, slightly shorter (this makes a difference in the cramped submarines!).

Greek: Muscular build.

Names

Egyptian: "Ark-Isa-Ra," "Ahm-Ni-Ra" (see p. EG85)

Atlantean: "Darius," "Nehram," "Wan Chu Rin"

Greek: "Ascleptes," "Perseus" (see p. GR72)

Languages

Unless otherwise noted, the defaults listed are for modern forms. The defaults are at +2 for an Ancient form. e.g. where Greek is at -3, Ancient Greek is -1.) In addition to this, there is a -1 familiarity penalty to deal with the dialects, which is removed after 8 hours of study with an appropriate teacher or in 16 hours using just books or conversation.

Atlantean: Latin-4. (Or if the GM preferse, Sanskrit-4.)

Egyptian, Formal: Written Only (Hieroglyphs): Ancient Egyptian

Egyptian, Informal: Spoken/Copic Script: Egyptian-4.

Greek: Greek-4.

Bioroid/Uplift Rights

Atlantis: It is not desired to artificially create intelligence, but if they do not look too different, they can become

citizens, provided they can prove their cognitive ability.

Egypt: They are second-class citizens, used in labor. Those that are given the chance, however, can move up in society, but still keep that stigma.

Greece: The most common soldier, they are allowed great latitude within the enlisted portion of the army, to the highest ranks there, but still face some stigma outside this structure.

Freedom of Movement

Atlantis: Citizens are quietly discouraged from frivolous travel, but registered vacations are acceptable. Strangers are noticed and reported.

Egypt: Citizens are kept busy, and those that can afford to travel may do so with travel papers from their local temple (see p. EG21). Foreigners are noticed, and may find prices increased to meet their purses.

Greece: Citizens are encouraged to travel the Greek kingdom, and travelers are welcomed heartily in communities for the stories and wealth they bring.

Citizen Templates (for *GURPS Fourth Edition*)

The Taboo Trait could be replaced with a Secret or Social Stigma (Genetic Defects) if the person *does* have genetic disadvantages and can or cannot hide them (respectively) in those countries. The Debt represents the taxes atypical of the Control Ratings. (See also the section on "Composite forms," p. EG78, and "Traits," p. F213.) Any "racial" template from Transhuman Space might be appropriate (with the exception of those intended for Zero-G environments).

Atlantean [25 points]

Attributes: HT+2 [20].

Advantages: Comfortable [10]; Taboo Trait (Genetic Defects) [0].

Disadvantages: Xenophilia (15) [-5].

Egyptian [25 points]

Attributes: DX+1 [20]; HT+1 [10]; HP+1 [2].

Advantages: Filter Lungs (Dust and Sand Only, -80%) [1]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Taboo Trait (Genetic Defects) [0]; Temperature Tolerance 1 (Heat only) [1].

Disadvantages: Xenophilia (12) [-10].

Greek [25 points]

Attributes: ST+1 [10]; IQ+1 [20].

Advantages: Attractive [5]; Taboo Trait (Genetic Defects) [0]; Wealthy [20].

Disadvantages: Debt 5 [-5]; Xenophilia (9) [-15].

Popular Upgrades/Xenomods

- Felicia (see Felicia II, pp. TS117, B261, FB70, ["Furry Thoughts"](#))
- Bipedal "Sphinx" (as Felicia, above, see also pp. EG109, GR102)
- Minotaur (see p. GR100, or p. FF116 without striker horns or mental disadvantages)
- Crocodile -- Amphibious (see Reptile Men, FF 128)
- Harpy (aliform), see pp. GR100, 101 (similar to Great Eagles, FF91, but remove Mute)
- Satyr -- see pp. FF66, GR104
- Anubite/lagomorph (Felicia + Super Jump 1 and 2 respectively) EG 104 (see The Mummy Returns (2001))
- Merfolk Aquatic (Atlantean only) (Fish Men, FF 70) CA 103
- "Northern" (See the Ruanmao biomod, p. ItW97, with Protected Sense (Vision) and several levels of Night Vision.)

Adventure Seeds

Around the World In . . . How Long? The race is on! The PCs must guard/participate in a race between two capitol! Whether the race is by land, sea or air, it will not be easy (see Communication, above, for distances).

- As above, but the race is around the world (over 8,000 miles). Sea travel will also be required.
- As above, but it is a circuit between all three capitol -- over 10,300 miles in all!

The Canal (Panama/Suez) Yea/Nay -- You Dig? The mega-projects are underway (or just starting, see "Territory," above). The Atlantean government disapproves of the tolls involved, even if factions within in look forward to the drastic reduction in shipping times.

Civilize the Nations! Be teachers in a "backward" part of the world. Learn the local language! See exotic places! Make a cultural *faux pas*!

Cool Runnings: The Greek embassy in an Egyptian capitol has contracted for an Atlantean Air Conditioning unit to be installed to fight the dreadful heat. The Egyptian contractors aren't happy about all the foreigners. The Greek staff isn't happy about letting all these people in here, and insist the unit be installed in a small shack in the compound *next* to the embassy building. The Atlanteans, like anyone else, might be spies, but they can withstand the heat better than the Greeks, and are being paid very well . . . The PCs can be of any nationality or standing, and still find something to do here . . .

For the Love Of . . .: Barbarians have kidnapped the betrothed of an important NPC/Patron! Go to the rescue! (Besieging Troy is optional.)

The Gambler: The party must be bodyguards while the gambler visits locations to play. The money and reputations must be protected when scandals and accusations fly.

Genetic Rights Management (GRM) Advocacy: "Why make a life if it's just a toy?" There are protests about artificial life. Are they just concerned citizens, or is there something propelling them to cause this disturbance? Some of the more radical conservative factions within the Atlantean government could anonymously fund such a movement *anywhere*, even within their own borders.

Geomancy: A lead geomancer indicates that *this* could be a "great" spot to place a huge Ark Furnace that could power whole provinces . . . except for:

- Location (owned by a native tribe, a hostile company, or in the center of a town . . .)
- Bad weather (storm season is about to start)
- Competitors
- Spies

Saboteurs

- Family
- Local Feuds in which both factions ask the team to take sides, and *the site* is in the center of the battlefield
- Local critters (which hate the party, or like the taste of rubber . . .)

Inspectors of Habit: Any government (see p. EG118, GR11) may create a special investigator team empowered with experimental technology and bio-enhancements. An impartial team would be comprised of individuals with different powers from a number of different temples. They could be as low-powered as Sherlock Holmes, as innocent as Scooby-Doo himself, or as advanced as Ghostbusters.

Johnny and the Bomb: The party finds an *unexploded*, ticking, Atlantean torpedo floating in the ocean, or resting on a beach. It is common knowledge that many governments will pay handsomely for one delivered intact. The trick is moving it safely.

Possible complications include:

- The Atlantean ship is still in the area.
- The torpedo will explode in 1d days unless disarmed (with Explosives(EOD)/TL (1+6)).
- Bandits will want to steal it for the reward, and destroy it if they cannot.

Olympia! A natural outcome of augmented humans is the realm of Supers! With enough superscience, even the level of "four-color" superheroes is obtainable!

The Olympic games are coming! (See pp. GR18, AT79) The heroes must:

- Become or train athletes.
- Provide security.
- Spot and report cheaters.
- Prevent transfers of performance-enhancing potions/elixirs.

Q-Tip: The heroes go undercover as merchants or aides (but not guards) in an under-protected caravan.

- As above, but there are bandits planning to ambush a Customs patrol near the end of their patrol, when they are the weariest (and wealthiest).
- As above, but the guards are distracted and giving the merchants a hard time, thoroughly inspecting the wagon train.

Raiders of the Lost Ark Furnace: Nomad raiders have been spotted in the area. Orders/rewards are to find them and report back before more innocent lives are lost.

- As above, but the party must slow them down with sabotage. (Perhaps by stealing their power generator for which there is a reward.)
- As above, but the party must eliminate the threat one way or another.

Shoot the Moon: One government (as presented, probably Egypt), is spending all possible resources on a space program. The other governments naturally see this as a weapon that could drop a shell anywhere on the planet. It must be stopped/protected at *any* cost. See also the Space Launch Catapult on p. STE95, the Verne Cannon on pp. CF16, 120, 127), and the [Passenger Artillery](#).

Tomb Guardians/Dungeon Keeper: The PCs could be supernatural beings, bound servants, or even ex-tomb raiders cursed to serve until released. They may have to go to town, make investments and research/build new traps, or even hire guards. They are stuck with the job until they are killed, or until the boss either "moves on" (which is the only way they can die "of old age") or "wakes up" (so they can negotiate with him/her . . . although their bargaining position may be weak) (see p. EG95).

Tour guide / Places to see

- **Atlantis:** Coliseum, Great Wall, Taj Mahal (p. PM60).
- **Egypt:** Great Library (see p. F99), Lighthouse of Alexandria, Pyramids (and Sphinx) (p. PM28).
- **Greece:** Colossus, Temple of Athena, Statue of Zeus, Stonehenge (p. PM21).
- **Babylon:** Hanging Gardens

Twenty Leagues Under the Sea

Tickets for soldiers or mercenaries, each easier said than done.

(Pick one from each of A, B and C):

- **1d Objectives A**
 - 1-3 Steal
 - 4-5 Destroy
 - 6 Steal back
- **1d Goal B**
 - 1-4 The
 - 5-6 Plans for
- **1d Items C**
 - 1 Airship
 - 2 Battlesuit/Mecha
 - 3 Enhanced Soldier
 - 4 Infantry Weapon / Ammunition
 - 5 Submarine
 - 6 Tank

Complications:

- The captain (or soldier) guarding/operating it is a turncoat, and can identify the heroes, but does not know someone is coming.
- As above, but they *do* know someone's coming.
- As above, but they know it is the PCs-surely there is a security leak somewhere!

Wild ____ Chase: A noble has received word that there is a ____ (see "Pets," above for ideas) loose relatively nearby. The reward will be decreased if the creature is harmed at all.

- As above, but it is an escaped pet.
- As above, but it was the pet of a young girl who will hate the heroes if the creature is injured.

Civil Unrest

Civil unrest plagued historic civilizations from time to time, and can be a popular setting for books, movies, and roleplaying (see pp. F81-85).

Golden Age

- Keep barbarians out.
- Participate in travel, commerce, and intrigue.

Decline

- Protect the true heirs.
- Keep local powers in line.
- Ensure the safe delivery of taxes, supplies to/from loyal regions.
- Safeguard the wealth and technological secrets of the empire. Ensure that libraries are stowed safely until reasonable scientists can use it, and that enemies and villains don't find it.

Dark Ages

- Protect your city.
- Duels in tanks/airships?
- Help cultivate and represent the best hope for the future.
- Man an outpost of civilization (such as a monastery): protect it from raiders; protect the farmlands (and farmers) from monsters and other evil things . . . Like a typical fantasy campaign . . .

Founding of an Empire

- Advance scouts for an army
- Sabotage enemy supply lines
- Help found the new court by securing allies and convincing local lords to join the cause.
- Root out traitors
- Start new traditions

Merging with Existing Campaigns

Castle Falkenstein

As is, but, due to its rarity, *any* iron has the effect of "star iron."

Mis-jump

A "pull" portal is likely to be in front of masses . . . Many Egyptians (and possibly some Greeks) may assume that any "furry" character stepping through a portal in a public place may be a deity (or direct servants thereof) -- if they seem the part from the outset. (The Atlanteans will respect beam weapons more.) Failing that, an appropriate display of power may be enough to convince the locals that they are minor super beings. If they don't ask too much, they may even be tolerated . . .

Space

This planet has a few resources that make it attractive to trade-orichalcum and biological curiosities. Its populace would also make good interstellar diplomats, as they are able to ignore racial negative appearance. In a *Traveller* setting, the abundance of pure hydrogen means that a starship could set down at almost any city and be able to depart directly.

Pyramid Links

- [Bangkok](#) by Matt Riggsby
- [Cairo by Gaslight](#) by Andrew Hind
- [Chretien's Garden](#) (Transhumanist fantasy for *Nobilis*) by Bradley Robins
- ["Dirigibles Over Africa"](#) by Mark Gellis
- ["Floating on Air"](#) (Airships, dirigibles and zeppelins with deck plans) by David Morgan-Mar
- [Getting There is Half the Fun](#) North America in Castle Falkenstein (with a Large map!) by Steve Long

- [Not-So-Plain Sailing"](#) by David Morgan-Mar
- [Use Archaeology to Uncover Hidden Adventure Ideas"](#) by Kenneth Hite
- [Wizard's Tower"](#) By David Moore

Other Links

[An Eastern Atlantis](#) (with maps)

[Terra Cotta Army](#)

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Special Thanks to Daniel Boese and Ilona Funk for their expertise in Egyptology and alternate Atlantean Mythos.

That's What I Want

A History and Possible Futures of Money

by Matt Riggsby

Sure. You can say that your character is driven by a desire to learn hidden secrets, defend the defenseless and rid the world of hideous evil. But we all know what *really* motivates PCs: money. But money is more than just a reward for a monster well killed and something to roll around in laughing. It's the life-blood of most economies and, when it was invented, a world-altering social and economic concept.

Money is a medium of exchange, a measure by which the value of unlike goods can be compared. Just as science would be revolutionized thousands of years later by the development of instruments which could measure time and temperature, the invention of coinage revolutionized economics by providing a sort of yardstick with which to measure value. The relationship between the values of, say, a jug of wine, a wheel of cheese, and coil of rope is unclear and difficult to pin down without a common language to express those values in. Imagine, for example, trying to express the relative values of cheeseburgers, auto repairs, and concert tickets without the abstract standard of money. Having a unit of measure for value didn't make it completely trivial to measure values, but it did provide a vital framework.

Money also allows value to be stored in a more durable form than food or other perishables and a more portable form than almost any commodity, with the exception of gemstones and particularly valuable chemical preparations, such as perfumes, medicines, and spices. Instead of carting a load of grain to market and trading some of it for a chicken, some for a new cooking pot, some for a bolt of cloth, and so on until the grain was gone, someone could trade the grain for a purse of money in a single transaction, then buy other items at his leisure.

Coins

Until the past few centuries, almost all money has been in the form of coins, bits of valuable metal of a known weight and purity with a mark indicating official sanction. The precise origin of money is debated, but recognizable coins started to appear in a number of places in the first quarter of the first millennium BC and apparently had a rapid effect on their economies.

The traditional copper-silver-gold progression found in most fantasy game settings holds true for a great many societies (platinum, which appears in some fantasy currencies, wasn't historically available until the 19th century). That is, most historical monetary economies have had copper coins, more valuable silver coins, and even more valuable gold coins. There is also a certain amount of overlap caused by alloying. Higher-denomination "copper" coins may be made of silver-plated copper or a copper-silver alloy, called billon. Likewise, high-denomination "silver" or low-denomination "gold" coins may be made of gold-plated silver or electrum, a silver-gold alloy. For all metals, a certain amount of alloying is likely. Copper and silver coins may have a small admixture of lead to make the metal easier to strike, while gold coins may have some silver added to make them a bit more durable.

More importantly, though, rather than using exotic materials to produce coins of various values, most governments simply minted different sizes of coins made from more familiar metals. While it's convenient to have the relative values of coins match the relative values of metals (for example, gold is ten times as valuable as silver, so a gold piece is worth ten times as much as a

Everything Has Its Price

One of the other revolutionary things about money is that it introduced the idea that *anything* could be exchanged for *anything else*. In non-monetary economies, goods are frequently divided into "spheres of exchange": cattle, for example, might only be traded for gold, wives, and iron weapons, but not for mangoes, cloth, wood, or anything else. Some things might even be regarded as beyond the realm of economic exchange (the idea of owning land seems absurd in any number of unsophisticated cultures). When introduced into such economies, money acts as an economic universal solvent, breaking down socially imposed barriers to various kinds of exchanges.

silver piece), that assumes that different coins are all the same weight. Historically, this has almost never been the case. Coins made from different metals are usually different weights, and there may be several different coins of each metal. Consider, for example, America coinage of the early twentieth century. Coins in regular circulation included a "copper piece" (the penny), at least five different sizes of "silver piece" (the silver or silver-based dime, nickel, quarter, half-dollar, and dollar), and a few different denominations of gold coinage (ten and twenty dollar pieces), as well as paper money.

In any case, the value of the currency is usually but not necessarily based on the intrinsic value of the precious metal it contains. That is, under most circumstances, any coin containing ten grams of silver will circulate at the value of ten grams of silver, even if one also contains three grams of copper and lead while another contains eight grams (yes, eight grams of copper and lead is marginally more valuable than three, but compared to the value of the silver content, it's trivial). However, there are exceptions. Governments tend to give preference to transactions in their own currency, while exact purity of foreign coins may be in doubt, so local currencies, if they can be trusted, tend to circulate at a higher value than foreign ones.

Although there are many exceptions, historical coins also tend to be on the small side relative to modern coins and absolutely tiny relative to the gold ten and twenty dollar coins of American history (or the ten-to-a-pound coins of Dungeons and Dragons). The vast majority top out at the size of an American nickel or Euro five cent coin, albeit possibly a bit thicker, with many being smaller. Ten to fifteen grams is a typical weight regardless of the material, with few circulated coins going above twenty and some going as low as four or five. One of the few things that a popular fantasy game got right about gold coins is that they can feasibly be used as a standard measurement of weight. Silver and copper coins were typically struck "al marco." That is, some variation in weight between coins was tolerated so long as the average weight of the coins was correct; a bag of, say, eighty billon coins might weigh a pound, but the weights of individual coins might vary by a gram or two. Gold coins, however, were produced "al pezzo"; the weight of each piece was measured to make sure they were the same. Characters wanting to measure small weights precisely could use gold coins on their balances.

While there may be certain basic units in any set of currencies (for example, cents and dollars), decimal currencies are a relatively recent practice. For example, Medieval European currencies used a system using three major denominations of coin. The same system, based on Roman roots, was used throughout Western Europe, but the denominations are best known by their British names: pence, shillings, and pounds. Twelve pennies (the lowest denomination) made up a shilling, while twenty shillings went into a pound. There may not even be whole-number conversions between denominations. Late in the Roman period, the follis, a coin of moderate value, was worth twelve and a half denarii, the next smaller coin. And as if that weren't complicated enough, some larger denominations might not physically exist. For much of history, there was no pound coin. Rather, the pound was "money of account," a unit of measurement convenient for clerks working with large sums (say, a monk figuring the work of his monastery's holdings or a royal accountant writing up the expenses of a recent war). However, a pound coin would be inconveniently large for most transactions.

Not all types of metals will be found in all currencies. For some reason, the Byzantine empire abandoned silver coinage altogether for several centuries while still minting copper and gold coins. Very poor economies can lose higher denominations of coinage if they don't lose currency altogether. After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the west, western Europe went without its

Debasement

So if coins circulate at the value of their precious metal content, what good does it do for a government to debase its currency? In the short term, it works because there's a bit of a delay between new, debased coins being issued (which typically happens by the government spending them on something) and people discovering that they don't contain as much precious metal as earlier coins. The government can, therefore, get away with passing off inferior currency for a few weeks or months before word gets around and prices start to go up accordingly. A particularly strong government might be able to extend that period briefly by requiring the people it deals with to accept the new currency at its face value, but that puts a strain on those people by effectively cutting their incomes relative to the inflating prices in the rest of the economy.

In the long term...well, it doesn't do much good for anyone. Since prices are rising, the government must mint

own silver coins for several centuries and without locally minted gold coins until shortly before the Renaissance, simply because none of the governments of western Europe were wealthy enough to issue their own precious metal currency, nor were local economies developed enough to use them if they had. Where local minting didn't keep up with local demand for coinage, foreign coins were used, much as modern impoverished countries may use dollars if the locally produced currency seems worthless. Byzantine gold coins, for example, were used through western Europe when gold was called for, and both ancient and foreign silver coins were passed around. The generally low volume of new minting could easily keep old coins in circulation for a centuries and have them travel across continents. Because of their durability, coins can circulate for decades even in modern economies. In the United States, a handful of change might still contain a "wheat" penny minted in the early fifties.

If this seems complex and difficult to you, you're not alone. Between hard-to-work-with denominations, questionable purity of the metal, a gap between the circulating value of the coins and the value of the raw metal, and legal questions about the uses of some coins, it's enough to give any accountant a headache, even those who regularly use such currencies. This presents a choice for GMs thinking of preparing their own currency systems. Introducing half-crowns, maiorinae, pentanummia, and other odd denominations may be more detail than the campaign is willing to support, since it complicates bookkeeping. Unless your players enjoy doing a lot of math, they may not appreciate having to convert a long list of different types of coins into one easy-to-use amount. Still, it makes for more a more vivid description if characters find a purse of "Royal Dragons" and get change in "five-stars" rather than serviceable but prosaic gold and silver pieces.

In addition to their economic uses, coins have symbolic functions. Coins are usually decorated with a symbol indicating the values and approval of the issuer. For example, some ancient Athenian coins bore the image of an owl, representing the city's patron goddess Athena. The use of coins for propagandistic purposes was perfected by the early Roman emperors. By putting the emperor's likeness on coins, the imperial government put a picture of the ruler in everyone's pocket. This may not seem like much in these days when representations of public figures are everywhere, but before the invention of other technologies to reproduce images, this ensured that the emperor would be the one person familiar to everyone in his empire. Rejecting representation for religious reasons, medieval Islamic rulers put Koranic inscriptions on their money.

Coins are usually circular, but have been oval and rectangular as well. Other flat shapes are certainly possible. For example, Chinese emperors have issued cleaver-shaped coins, and other Chinese experiments took the form of sickles and other tools. Some coins are modified for easy mass transport. A number of Chinese coins have holes in the center so that they can be strung together, while others were packed together in a sealed purse like a sausage skin. The purse would be traded as a single unit with the value of its combined coins. And as noted [elsewhere](#), some coins were designed to be broken up into even smaller bits for lesser transactions.

Paper Money

Over the past few centuries, coins have been almost universally replaced by paper money. Coins remain in use for the lowest denominations, but "serious" money is in the form of folding cash. Paper money was the subject of experimentation in antiquity, but many people had difficulty accepting it. For example, it appeared sporadically in China for centuries through the Middle Ages, when the government's supplies of silver ran low. The notes represented the promise of a quantity of silver, which the government might not actually have at the moment. Inevitably, and fairly quickly, the emperors issuing the currency fell victim to the temptation of printing more of it, which always led to a crash in the value of the currency.

The evolution of paper money in Europe began at around the same time it did in China, but it developed more slowly

more currency to catch up. Because its supply of precious metal is probably already under stress, it'll have to debase the next round of coins even more, kicking off another round of inflation. The government can try to raise taxes to rebuild its stocks of precious metals by raising taxes, but typically people hoard old, good coins and spend the newer, bad ones, which means that the government recovers less precious metal than it would otherwise. Debasement can gain a ruler a temporary advantage, but it usually sets off a disastrous inflationary spiral.

and on a slightly different trajectory. The precursors of European paper money were privately issued rather than printed by the government, and they weren't money yet. Rather, at major trade fairs, international merchants started to reach agreements where one handed over goods now in return for the promise of other goods in trade later. These deals were recorded in promissory notes, which slowly started to be traded themselves. At about the same time, money lenders (initially monastic orders offering the service to help Crusaders, but wealthy merchant houses got in on the operation later) started issuing letters of credit, indicating to other branches of their operation that a customer had deposited a sum of money with them and should be allowed to withdraw it elsewhere. Like the promissory notes, the letters of credit represented actual value and were eventually traded themselves. This was a far less sophisticated use of paper instruments than in China, but it did plant the seed of the idea that a paper representation of value was as useful for many purposes as the valuable thing itself. The use of paper money grew slowly but steadily after that, eventually coming to dominate monetary exchanges in the 19th century.

A development that appeared along with paper money is currencies based on, for lack of a better word, trust rather than on the value of bullion in hand. If you dealt in coin, you had something valuable concretely in front of you. With paper money, you had to trust that the merchant you were dealing with would be back at the fair next year, the money-lender had sufficient assets to cover the amount of the letter of credit, and so on. But the gap between the value represented by the currency and the goods which it represents has been growing steadily wider. While a number of governments hold reserves of precious metals and other valuables, few if any hold enough bullion to cover the value of circulating currency. Instead, the value of most modern currencies is based on trust: the government's perceived ability to collect on and repay debts and the user's belief that the currency will be accepted by banks, shopkeepers, etc. As a result, weak countries and unstable governments usually have weak currencies, while stronger and more stable nations have stronger currencies. Technically, precious metal coinages are based on trust as well, the belief that others will regard a particular metal as valuable. However, once the idea of money has been established in a society, faith in the value of precious metals has historically proved to transcend faith in nation, government, religion, and family.

If paper money is to be used at all in a low-tech economy, it requires an already heavily monetized economy, which most ancient economies were not, and a stable, well-administered government that is not likely to print too many bills, thereby driving down the value of money. In higher-tech economies, the need for money usually far outstrips reserves of precious metals, so paper money becomes a necessity. Many early modern currencies (including a great deal of American money during the first fifty years or so after independence) were not issued or backed by governments, but by private banks, although in some cases the private banks, such as the Bank of England, were operating in partnership with the government. In such cases, money can be treated much like a cashier's check drawn against the bank's own assets. If the bank is known (or believed) to be in trouble, people may refuse to take its notes as payment, or may take them only at a discounted rate.

Since paper money is so easy to produce, issuers of currency must stay on guard against the temptation to print more money than the economy can support. To do otherwise can wreck an economy. After the First World War, an impoverished German government flooded the economy with new currency to pay the tremendous cost of reconstruction, leading to inflation rates of well over 1000% per month. In modern countries, the money supply is often regulated by national banks or councils of bankers, who have a vested interest in preventing inflation, but extreme circumstances and political imperatives can force reckless monetary policies on them. The consequences of printing too much money are similar to that of debasing coinage: a short term fix that often spells long-term disaster.

Under ideal conditions, paper money is made from the highest quality paper to resist the wear of extensive handling. Since it is based on relatively cheaply and easily produced paper and ink rather than innately valuable materials, the issuer must take extra steps to prevent counterfeiting. Most paper currencies are decorated with elaborate, difficult to reproduce designs, such as pictures of leaders, landmarks, and national symbols or elaborate scrollwork around the edges. Some early currencies were printed with plates incorporating a tree leaf. Since it would be almost impossible for a counterfeiter to find another leaf of the exact same shape and size and with the same pattern of veins, it would be equally difficult to copy. Individually numbering bills also complicates the counterfeiter's task. An issuer might be powerful enough to restrict access to the model of printing press or even the specific types of paper and ink used to print their bills. Elaborate coloring schemes are currently in use across most of the world. In addition to the added security they give, they make it easier to distinguish different denominations at a glance. With improving technology, more elaborate anti-counterfeiting schemes must be used. Now that computers and cheap color printers allow skilled

users to reproduce any printed image they want, some countries put a metalized or plastic strip inside the paper itself. Future governments might print bills with multiple images which can only be viewed with infrared or ultraviolet light or use holographic images, computer chips, or radioactive isotopes for validation. In a fantasy campaign, money might have some kind of mystical authentication.

Possible Currencies

While currencies have historically been based on precious metals, it is possible that other media may be used. If it is to be tied to the value of an actual medium rather than trust in the social system that supports it, useful currency must be based on a commodity that is scarce, in demand, easily quantified, and easily divided or combined into sums appropriate to any reasonable transaction. For example, although they are valuable, gems are unlikely to become a currency, since gemstones cannot be divided into smaller units without changing their value (because larger gems are less common than small ones, two one-carat gems together are less valuable than one two-carat gem), nor recombined once they have been divided. Here are some media that may be or have been used as the basis of a currency.

Precious metals: Gold, silver, copper, platinum (if available) and their alloys are likely to remain a good basis for currency until cheap, powerful energy sources make transmutation of lighter elements on a large scale practical. Metals make an ideal currency (in fact, one might argue that money came to act as it does because those functions happen to fit the properties of metals well). They may be melted down, alloyed, purified, and recast repeatedly without losing any of their intrinsic value. In addition to their scarcity, many precious metals are excellent conductors of electricity, in demand for high-performance electrical parts at appropriate levels of technology.

Trade goods: Certain commodities have been treated as or used as the basis of a system of currency, including salt, cocoa pods, compressed blocks of tea, and tobacco. All were, in their contexts, relatively uniform in quality (or at least easily graded) and could easily be divided or combined without effecting the value as a whole. What these economies have had in common is that they were relatively underdeveloped. For example, tobacco was the basis of a currency system in early colonial Virginia where the economy depended on tobacco farming and not enough hard cash was coming in from England to satisfy local needs. A system of currency developed much as paper money had developed from promissory notes centuries earlier, with notes representing goods held elsewhere, with the expectation that they could be exchanged for "real" money later. In the other cases, the economies where trade goods acquired a monetary status were usually on the periphery of more developed economies. The trade goods were primary imports or exports and attained sufficient importance in local economies that they could form the basis of an exchange system (this could easily happen in a SF campaign, where a relatively primitive planet has large stores of a rare and valuable mineral or is the sole source of a valuable plant or animal resource). This is sufficient for temporary use, with "temporary" possibly meaning decades or even a century or two, but as the local economy develops, inflation and increased economic activity may push prices into a realm where blocks of salt or bundles of cocoa pods become inconveniently cumbersome, and a new basis for money will eventually need to be found.

Energy: As technology increases, people may be limited only by how much energy they can bring to bear. Energy sources will only become more and more important, since high-tech devices consume huge amounts of power. Stored energy (in the form of batteries and power cells) culled from generators or natural sources, or, more likely, energy-rich materials such as petroleum, radioactive isotopes, or antimatter might become the ultimate currency. Energy can be measured easily and shuffled between batteries, and it is likely to remain in limited supply until the appearance of total conversion power plants. In a world with highly developed magic, magical energy might be a medium of exchange if suitable means can be found to transfer it.

Drugs and complex organics: Societies with particularly advanced biological sciences, including the societies of many cyberpunk campaigns, may start to see drugs used as a standard of exchange. A moderately high level of biological technology would make complex chemicals common enough to use as a medium of exchange without becoming so common as to lose their value. Properly treated, drugs may be stored indefinitely, divided into small doses or diluted for easier distribution, and combined into large quantities simply by pouring them into the same container. An extremely low-end example of this kind of currency is a prison tattoo artist with a portfolio of designs with prices expressed in cigarettes and alcohol.

Labor: A number of science fiction stories, such as Jack Vance's Gaeon Reach novels, have a currency which represents labor. A coin might represent a day's or hour's labor. Each hour worked earns more of the currency. Workers in particularly skilled or dangerous occupations might earn such money at an accelerated rate (the difficulty of setting up such conversions is the main reason why labor-based currencies are likely to remain fictional, but the GM might postulate incredibly powerful actuarial computers which can work out feasible "exchange rates"). The currency might be based on specialized labor, such as military service or skilled technical services. As a peculiar example, Bruce Sterling's Shaper/Mechanist stories feature a "geisha bank," which issues a currency based on hours of sexual service. To some extent, a labor currency must be based on trust. Labor can be measured and subdivided, but it isn't portable. Unlike a vial of drugs or a battery full of energy, a "one-day" coin cannot itself be used as work. While the currency represents labor, it cannot contain the labor itself; it can only be exchanged for the labor it embodies.

Social privilege: While there are no historical precedents for this either, it is possible for a currency to represent a special privilege. For example, in a society with equipment which stimulates the brain's pleasure centers, a government might issue a currency which represents (and may be traded in for) time spent in utter synthetic bliss. Another society might have its citizens take turns in high office, but allow the people to trade their time among themselves. The currency would represent time spent in charge. Conversely, if all citizens are expected to perform public work generally considered drudgery, they might trade time off from those duties.

Random Thought Table: GTS (and Other Hazards of Vegas)

As foretold in the Dead Sea Scrolls (and recounted in last week's installment), I spent last week at GTS, which stands for the GAMA Trade Show. "GAMA" stands for "Game Manufacturers Association." Despite my Chaotic-Good-with-Grammatical-Tendencies alignment, I will *not* point out that:

- "GAMA" is only slightly more appropriate an acronym of "GAmE Manufacturers Association" than "GAMARA" or "G-MAN FACES A CAT,"
- I'd personally call it "Game Manufacturers' Association," and:
- Having a part of an acronym such as GTS consist of an acronym itself is an abomination.

(I also will not point out that a Certain President of a Game Company in Austin thinks "manufacturer" is the wrong word, and should in fact be "publisher." But that's a nuance for another column.)

Anyway, the GTS is the largest industry trade show, although it pales by comparison to many other trade shows such as E3, Toy Fare, Comdex, or IMTS. It also paled in the shadow of the industrial equipment trade show that was taking place at our hotel after GTS, where an outdoor exhibit featured dozens of shiny cranes, wrecking ball apparatuses, and other gargantuan machines many of which had (coincidentally, I'm sure) the Decipticon symbol on the side.

The day before the day before the show consisted of bag stuffing, which is where every company who brought fliers or other promotional information helped put copies of everyone else's literature into the bags that would be given out to the retailers visiting the show. The number of bags we were going to stuff had raised from 500 approximated to 1,500. Since the Evil Corporate Masters at my Day Job had to spend over a dollar apiece for our color catalogs, the discrepancy between the expected and the actual numbers was somewhat disconcerting. We ended up with a few catalogs left over; I needed to resist the urge to be too stingy with them, given the limited number and the cost, my natural inclination would have been antithetical to the nature of a trade show:

"Hi; do you have a catalog?"

"There should be one in your bag."

"I don't think there is."

"You're not getting one until you check . . ."

Anyway, it was during the bag stuffing festivities that I made my first startling discovery. Despite the fact that "Vegas" and "vegan" differ by only one letter, this is absolutely *no* relationship between these two concepts. Having become vegan for Lent, I found myself unable to find almost anything to eat during this time. A gargantuan buffet ended up in my eating salad, an ear of corn, and pasta with marinara sauce (although I was dismayed to see similar sauce days later with big ol' meatballs; methinks my red sauce may not have been as animal-free as I'd believed). I could be one of the only people to lose five pounds during a trip to Vegas.

The second day -- the day before the show -- consisted of setting up our booth. Since tables weren't supplied to the booths this year, and the cost to rent them was considerable, we figured out our own way to bring a display that could fit into our luggage. Amazingly we did so, with a display that -- if we had published and brought with us one more book -- would have resulted in our entire display being over the weight limit allowable by the airlines. Next year I may be forced to tape books to my body, like a coke mule for RPGs.

The first day of the show was somewhat quiet. I have nothing to compare it to, since it was my first GTS, so I don't know how crowds compared to previous years. We had a snazzy giveaway for retailers -- an animated motorized double-sized display that advertized our company and our books -- and gave them to pretty much any retailer that expressed interest. Unfortunately, there didn't seem to be all that many stores that dealt in RPGs; many of the retailers who were there seemed to concentrate on card games, board games, miniatures, and for all I know vegan food. Still, all the retailers we spoke with were very appreciative for thinking of actually trying to make our stuff and their stores

look good.

The last few days of the show went approximately the same as the first. Unfortunately, by Day Two a problem began to develop which became painfully apparent by Day Three -- I was losing my voice. Hard. By the end of Day Three I could speak about 50 words a day; this turned me into our booth's equivalent of Teller. I'd try to do my part when my other two booth-mates were busy, but I probably did more harm than good:

Retailer walks by booth, looking mildly curious.

STEVEN walks around booth holding a book and approaches the Retailer; he opens his mouth and emits a noise akin to a quieter version of the Donald Sutherland screech at the end of the **Invasion of the Body Snatchers** remake.

Retailer flees.

The end of Day Three was also tear down of the booth, where it was apparent that, in addition to the utterly gone voice, Las Vegas had bestowed upon me some kind of repertory problem. So now I was able to emit more than my 50 words a day, only it was a raspy cough that left me doubled over and gasping.

Day Four was entirely a "recovery" day, since our flight didn't leave until 5 p.m. that evening. I took advantage of our hotel's free \$10-in-slots offer, and I managed to blow through it at a quarter machine before I really even understood what was happening, nor did I even manage to win once. I was disappointed that Vegas had utterly failed to make me a gambling addict. We also visited the Star Trek Experience at the Hilton, which was an experience I found interesting enough to perhaps devote another column to at some point.

So now it's almost a week after returning, and although my voice is more or less back, I still have a respiratory/cold-like thing, resulting in lots of headaches as my body forces too much blood into my skull. Clearly, what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas . . . except the plague.

As if I didn't have enough going on, I got a new pair of glasses a week before GTS, and they came in today. It's my first pair of new frames in 10 years, and they're significantly squatter than my old frames. As a result, although my prescription hasn't changed at all, my body is reacting as if I was trying to see through a half-bottle of Dasani. I'm bumping into objects and experiencing new kinds of headaches different from the ones from coughing. It's a cornucopia of discomfort, and it's overflowing.

I have some additional thoughts regarding GTS, including some actual industry analysis. But that's going to have to wait for a week when I can breathe, see, and otherwise form cognitive thoughts that don't involve wondering if I need more or less phlegm to rebalance my humors. In the meantime, I hope you've enjoyed the least-conventional GTS review ever . . . even if it's unique in that I can't easily read what I've written.

--Steven Marsh

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Brains, Brawn, And BEMs

A New College for *GURPS IOU*

by Michael Walton

GURPS IOU is an incredibly versatile setting that can accommodate almost any character type. The book gives numerous examples of how magical or high-tech characters can be integrated into the campaign, but there is little attention paid to supers and psis (there is a reference to a possible School of Superhumanities on p. 93). Aliens don't fare much better; they're mostly treated as sub-groups of other types. This article introduces a new IOU college that specializes in these under-represented character types.

College Of Adventuring And Paranormal Exploits (CAPE)

CAPE is one of the more recent additions to the University. It is the result of a reorganization in which some junior faculty from COUP and WUSE carved out a niche for themselves. CAPE protects itself from absorption by requiring students to take some courses in other colleges. Proceeds from the exploits of faculty and students -- in the form of reward money or loot -- is the college's primary source of funding.

Students here study the use of paranormal talents. Novice supers attend classes alongside newly activated psis and extraterrestrial vigilantes (or invaders!). CAPE teaches students to use their powers for good . . . or to be good at being bad. Many gadgeteers and mages show an interest in this field, but CAPE doesn't have enough clout to fight off continual assaults from both WUSE and CoM. Students whose paranormal abilities involve inventing or spell casting are encouraged to take dual majors.

The focus on law enforcement -- and law breaking -- requires CAPE majors to take several COUP courses. This arrangement helps CAPE in disputes with other colleges -- nobody negotiates a settlement like COUP faculty. Knowing where to find a good lawyer is also quite useful for CAPE graduates; even those who don't commit crimes are frequently responsible for impressive amounts of property damage. CAPE enjoys similar symbiotic (or rather, commensal) relationships with WUSE and SCA. This keeps disputes over who has jurisdiction over certain classes to a minimum.

CAPE majors are often found at trouble spots, either because they're trying to stop the trouble or because they caused it. The Dean of the college, who is affectionately known as the Dean of Steel, encourages students to think of themselves as being in class 24-7. This is intended to prepare them for schedules that they'll have to keep after graduation.

Most CAPE classes are located in COUP buildings or the Headsded Gym. The more high-energy courses are taught in triple-reinforced underground "disaster rooms" that are loaded with technological death traps (mostly the results of WUSE projects; safety interlocks optional). Wandering into a disaster room without supervision is *not* recommended.

School of Superhumanities (SoS)

The largest division of CAPE trains supers. Heroes and villains both study here. Many supers meet their archenemies while still in school, and it's not unusual for study groups to go on to become super teams after graduation. SoS majors are mostly of the brightly colored spandex or the dark leather schools of fashion, though some Super-villainy majors favor expensive business suits. Student villains are more likely to be on the Smith-and-Wesson Scholarship (*GURPS IOU*, sidebar, p. 7) than any other students.

SoS courses focus on the use of metahuman powers and on general physical fitness. Combat techniques and power-

related skills are the main areas of study. All students in this school have 50+ points worth of Super-powers and associated skills (usually at low levels), Super Advantages, and enhanced attributes. Faculty have at least three times that amount! Super-heroics majors are encouraged to sign on with Campus Security for some much needed experience. The added firepower makes security teams much more formidable but also adds to the collateral damage that they inevitably do. SoS students are barred from joining the Team because their powers give them an unfair advantage.

Job opportunities for Superhumanities grads are limited; there are few openings for costumed vigilantes. Some become guards at ultra-high security installations. Most SoS graduates go into business for themselves as bounty hunters or criminal masterminds. One Ilumnus is known to have opened his own school for "gifted youngsters."

Typical Courses: SH101 -- Feats of Unusual Physicality (leaping tall buildings in a single bound, etc.), SH206 -- How to Establish and Maintain a Secret Identity, SV313 -- Death Traps Made Easy, SV522 -- Advanced Hideout Design.

School of Applied Parapsychology (SAP)

This is the place to go for training in psionic skills. All SAP students and faculty are active psionics. Power levels vary; there are students who are far more powerful (but vastly less skilled) than their professors. The department specializes in practical applications of psi, but some uses -- mainly in law enforcement or crime -- are covered in SoS or COUP classes. Psychic combat is only taught in SAP, though, and no other school can field talents of sufficient skill and power to break this monopoly. The chairing of SAP is known to be the most powerful psi on campus with the possible exception of the ArchDean.

Many of the students in Applied Parapsychology classes are not SAP majors. Telepaths, empaths, and clairvoyants can easily find a place in COUP while electrokinetics and cyberpaths are often WUSE majors. CAPE's cordial relations with COUP and WUSE allow psi-gifted majors from those colleges to cross over into SAP courses.

There are many career options for SAP graduates. Clairvoyants and psychometrics excel at detective work. A telekinetic can make a very good living as a high-stakes gambler specializing in craps or roulette. Empaths and telepaths make gifted politicians and businessthings (most such are double majors in COUP), and there are a number of well-known empaths who used dual CAPE-SPCA majors to launch entertainment careers.

Typical Courses: PSI010 -- Remedial Mind Reading, PSI132 -- Beginning Clairvoyeurism, PSI454 -- Long-range Telekinesis: Reach Out and Touch Someone, PSI512 -- Intermediate Mind Control.

School of Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI)

SETI is CAPE's most technology-oriented school. Extraterrestrial Intelligence majors learn how to build and operate starships, construct death rays, and carry off humans of the appropriate gender to repopulate their own species (Mars needs women, but Venus needs men . . .). Students with ambitions of conquest may take crossover classes in SCA's Department of Empire Building. Not all alien students are in SETI. Many have innate abilities that are best studied in SoS or SAP courses instead. Some of the technical classes are jointly taught with WUSE.

The appearances and capabilities of SETI majors are the most varied of any entity at IOU. Most species in the galaxy - and quite a few from other galaxies -- are represented among the students and faculty. Little green humanoids are only slightly more common than undulating masses of tentacles and super-intelligent shades of blue. It was in fact SETI Ilumni who initiated the effort to replace speciesist terms like "freshman" and "chairman" with more politically correct terms.

SETI graduates can easily find work on starship crews or as planetary ambassadors. Some acquire space stations and go into business as dry-docks, shipyards, or "starstops." A few become interstellar conquistadors, but it's rare for them to enjoy long careers.

Typical Courses: ET109 -- Basic Space Combat Tactics, ET283 -- Interstellar Navigation: Boldly Going Where No One Has Gone Before, WSCS371 -- To Serve Man (one of the few WSCS courses that is regularly taught), AE665 -- Advanced Starship Design.

Alphaman: Dean Of CAPE

ST 30, *DX* 12, *IQ* 11, *HT* 20

Advantages: Academic Status +6 (Dean), Ally Group (Department Heads, unwilling, 300-point characters, medium group, appears fairly often, 90 points), Appearance: Handsome, Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, Social Status +1, Strong Will +2, Tenure, Wealthy

Super Advantages: Costume, Damage Resistance +40, Flight, Hyperflight (75 points), Immortality, Parabolic Hearing (6 levels), Penetrating Vision (6 levels), Super Flight (2 levels), Telescopic Vision (4 levels), Ultrahearing, Vacuum Support

Disadvantages: Compulsive Behavior (Rescuing Civilians), Duty (to University, -10 points, quite often, can be hazardous), Enemies (villains du jour, small but powerful group, fairly often, -20 points), Honesty, No Sense of Humor, Pacifism (Cannot Kill), Truthfulness

Super Disadvantage: Vulnerability (Centaurium, very rare, 4 levels, 5 hexes, -18)

Quirks: Neat freak, No drugs or alcohol, Poses dramatically, Shy about romantic relationships, Spouts heroic catchphrases at any excuse

Skills: Administration-13, Area Knowledge (Earth)-14, Area Knowledge (IOU)-14, Area Knowledge (local space sector)-15, Astronomy-10, Biology-10, Boxing-18, Chemistry/TL7-10, Cloak-16, Computer Operation/TL7-13, Detect Lies-15, Disguise-16, Flight-17, Forensics/TL7-14, Intimidation-18, Law-13, Leadership-17, Merchant-12, Physics/TL7-10, Politics-13, Research-14, Survival (IOU)-17, Survival (Space)-15, Swimming-16, Tactics-15, Teaching-14, Throwing-17, Writing-15.

Alphaman is from a planet in the Alpha Centauri system. Centaurian society is based on super-heroics, but opportunities to excel are rare because the entire population has powers. When Alphaman heard about Earth he decided to make his reputation as a hero by helping out his species' "unfortunate less-evolved cousins."

One long and illustrious career later Alphaman is now retired from heroism. The ArchDean recruited him to teach superhumanities partly because of the cost savings of having a faculty member who *didn't need* The Treatment. Alphaman shrugs off most forms of damage without making a fuss -- there's just that minor problem with a rare mineral from his homeworld. The Dean of Steel no longer uses his alias of mild-mannered science writer Ken Clark, but he does take time from his administrative duties to teach classes in maintaining an alter ego -- as someone who kept his identity secret for decades using nothing more than a change of clothes and a pair of spectacles, he's certainly qualified. Alphaman is a popular figure at IOU because he frequently rescues students and other faculty from various campus hazards. When he's not saving someone he's encouraging CAPE students to do it.

Alphaman is 6'4", blond, green-eyed, and ridiculously muscular. He appears to be about 50 but is actually much older. He is instantly recognizable by his green tights, yellow cape, boots, and trunks, and the big yellow "A" on his chest.

Typical Dialogue: "This looks like a job for . . . the Beginning Heroics class!"

Variations

Silly: The Silly Alphaman is an unrepentant glory hound who comes off as a parody of comic book heroes. Add the Odious Personal Habit "Hogs the spotlight" and really play up the posing and catchphrase quirks. He never accepts rewards for his good deeds, but the ArchDean has arranged for all such compensation to come directly to the

University.

Weird: As written except that he always wears his costume.

Darkly Illuminated: This version is not the paragon of virtue that he appears to be. Take away the Honesty and Truthfulness disadvantages and add some Acting skill so that he can *simulate* those flaws. A Darkly Illuminated Alphaman is both meaner and more mercenary than the stereotypical comic book hero -- he might well be a Bully, but he protects his reputation by only cutting loose on criminals. He will definitely be more willing to accept rewards and might even be Greedy. He could also be lying about his vulnerability to Centaurium.

Appendix Z

The Wizard's Bookshelf

by Matt Riggsby

Books are traditionally a wizard's greatest asset, but they shouldn't just be standardized books full of spells. No, a wizard is after wisdom of every kind, and that wisdom may come in a variety of forms. No two volumes on his shelf will be the same: shape, size, material, and language will vary from book to book. They'll cover a variety of subjects as well; history and philosophy are important, and poetry and religious works may contain hidden mystical significance. Rather than telling your victorious heroes ransacking a shelf "You find a bunch of books," these tables can be used to come up with rich descriptions of any written text.

Language

Most people write in their own language or dialect, but may choose a different one to communicate with a specialized audience. Roll 3d6.

Roll	Language Type	Comments
3-9	Common	In medieval Italy, this might be a dialect of Italian, although not necessarily the local dialect. It could be Tuscan in Umbria, Umbrian in Sicilly, etc.
10	Common modern foreign	A reasonably accessible foreign language (English or German in Italy)
11-12	Common ancient	A well-known but extinct language (Latin in Italy)
13-14	Obscure modern foreign	A little-known or perhaps completely unknown tongue (Chinese or Tlingit in Italy)
15	Obscure ancient	A lost tongue (Egyptian hieroglyphics in Italy)
16-17	Otherworldly	(Elvish in Italy)
18	Code	The manuscript is probably in a known, or at least accessible, but encoded.

Shape

Books have taken on different forms over the years. Wizards, being antiquarians by nature, may have some very old ones. Roll 2d6.

Roll	Shape	Comments
2-3	Bound papers	No binding, just loose pages with a string or other band around them.
4-7	Large book	A foot or more on any one side, too large to carry comfortably; books up to three feet tall are not unknown, although books of that size are usually large-print, meant for group reading at a distance. Bibliophiles will call these folios (using single sheets of paper or parchment for each page) or quartos (a single sheet folded twice, to make four pages).
8-9	Small book	Small enough to carry in a pouch or pocket; octavo (sheet folded to make eight pages) down to tricesimo-segundo (sheet folded to make 32 pages).
10-11	Scroll	A long sheet of paper, rolled up
12	Accordion	An intermediate form between scroll and codex (a modern bound book with multiple pages),

fold historically found mostly in Japan. Instead of being rolled into a cylinder, the paper is folded accordion-like. The book can be read in one direction, turned over, and read in the other, with the text this time around being on the insides of the pages read the first time (and vice versa).

Binding

Those stacks of paper have to be protected from the elements somehow. Usually, anyway. Roll 3d6.

Roll	Binding	Comments
3	None	Simply a collection of bound pages
4-7	Wood	Thin wooden boards, perhaps painted or otherwise decorated.
8-9	Common leather	For example, cow or sheepskin. These and the other bindings may themselves be stretched over wooden boards.
10	Plain cloth	For example, cotton or linen
11	Metal	Thin-beaten sheets of ornamental metal.
12-13	Fine cloth (silk, velvet)	Silk, velvet, etc.
14-15	Unusual leather	Shark, lizard, fish
16	Ivory/horn	
17	Human skin	
18	Otherworldly	Dragonskin, werewolf felt, etc.

Embellishments

Many books will have special individual features. This is optional, but probably interesting. Roll 3d6.

Roll	Embellishment	Comments
3	Jewelry	Decorated with gems and precious metals
4-5	Unusual material	The pages themselves are made out of something odd: cloth, leather, beaten metal, thin glass, etc.
6-7	Illumination	Contains full-blown illumination: Elaborate painting, gold leaf, elaborately decorated capitals, etc.
8-9	Illustration	Contains simple diagrams and sketches
10-11	Marginal Notes	At least one owner has scribbled notes in the margins. This may help illuminate confusing passages or confuse clear ones.
12	Lock/latch	Has a latch, keeping it from opening accidentally if dropped.
13	Case	Comes with its own hard slipcover or box
14	Chain	Chained to the shelf to keep it from being moved
15	Ribbon bookmark	Has an integral place marker.
16	Compartments	Has small components to hold a magnifying glass, pen and tiny inkwell, or other aid to reading.
17-18	Magical features	Provides its own light, helps pronounce unfamiliar words, has a face on the cover that groans when anyone other than the owner reads from it, etc.

Subject

And what's the book actually about? Roll 3d6.

Roll	Subject	Comments
3-4	Magical instruction	An actual spellbook with specific instructions on how to do magical work

5-6	Poetry	Individual poems or an epic
7	Religious text	A primary religious or mystical text (such as the Bible, the Koran, or the I Ching)
8	Biography	The life of a notable person
9	Geography	A description of a country or region
10	Philosophy	Abstract philosophy of a not-strictly-religious nature (for example, Plato or Aristotle), academic discussion (grammar, music, politics), or vaguely scientific "natural" philosophy.
11	History	The history of a specific event or country
12	Speeches/Letters	Collected speeches or correspondence
13-14	Commentary	Commentary on one of the above (much of ancient literature consisted of commentary on primary works, such as the poems of Homer or the works of Confucius)
15	Journal	
16-18	Collection/Florilegium	A collection of notable excerpts from other works (say, 2d6 + 10, roll as necessary for each one, ignoring further results of 16-18).

Pure reference works (dictionaries, log tables, etc.) range from the rare to the nonexistent through most of history.

Pyramid Review

James Ernest's Totally Renamed Spy Game

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

Illustrated by Cheyenne Wright

112-Card Deck, Small Rules Sheet; \$15.00

Once upon a time there was a card game. It was a cleverly designed little card game. It was a popular card game. But not everyone liked the card game because they felt it infringed on their intellectual property. So they told the card game that it had to change its name. Which was a shame because everyone else thought it was a fun name. But the card game had no choice and that was [the end](#) of that. Fortunately the card game was not without brains, and decided to give itself a whole new name. One that would not make certain people angry.

First released in 1997 under a name that dare not be mentioned, *James Ernest's Totally Renamed Spy Game* returns in an all-new format, in full color, and still poking fun at the genre conventions of certain series of films about a British super spy. Most important of all, it does this without reference to the central character of said film series. The central idea in the new edition remains the same as it was in 1997. What happens every time a super spy breaks into the lair of a criminal mastermind? He gets caught and the criminal mastermind locks him up inside a deathtrap. But does he push the button, pull the lever, or activate the countdown that will send the interloper to his certain death? Of course not. This is an opportunity for the insane evil genius to extol his own virtues, to gloat over the spy's capture, and to taunt him with the very details of his villainous master plan. And while he drones on, the super spy seizes the opportunity to escape his bonds, and thus certain death, before exiting the lair to the sound of explosions in his wake. Life would be so much simpler if the criminal mastermind just put a bullet in his brain, but old habits do die hard. Quite literally . . .

Designed for three to six players, *James Ernest's Totally Renamed Spy Game* is a silly intrusion into the world of B-movie supervillains and the spies they never seem to bump off. Each player takes the role of a criminal mastermind, building a lair large enough to tempt would-be spies, and then taunting and killing them before they can escape and blow up said lair. This vaguely new, all refitted edition of the popular original returns in full color, its cards attractively illustrated by Cheyenne Wright.

The 112 cards consist of four types: 36 each of Spies, Doublers, Lairs, and just four Bombs. Spies and Bomb cards have purple backs to tell them apart from the blue of the Doublers and Lairs. This is intentional, as the Spies and Bombs have to stand out. Lair cards represent improvements to mastermind's base, and are marked with values between one and four. The Spies are marked between two and nine, while the Doublers are labeled with letters A through I.

Game play remains the same as the original. A Player begins with a hand of five cards and can conduct three actions per turn. The first is drawing two cards from the deck; the second is adding a Lair card to his base. This gives it new facilities such as "Hall of Magnets," "Clown Car," and "Tank of Killer Fish," which are placed face down on the table. The total value of a base's Lair cards is important when it comes to a spy's attempt to blow it up.

The third action is *slightly* more complicated. A Spy or Bomb can be played from a player's own hand, or that of any player, or from the top of the deck onto any lair including the player's own. Hence the need for them to have different colored backs. If not played from a player's own hand, the intended destination of the Spy or Bomb card must be

declared beforehand. Alternatively, a team of Spy cards can sent from the player's own hand into a rival's lair.

Any Bomb played onto a lair automatically blows it up, whereas a Spy causes all of its facilities to be exposed. Their combined value is compared to that of the Spy or Spies, and if less than the intruders, then the lair blows up. All of the Lair and Spy cards are discarded. If the value of the Spy is equal to or less than the lair, he is captured. And a captured Spy means taunting!

Alternatively, in a fit of common sense, a Mastermind could execute the spy and score just a few points. But taunting is in the nature of the criminal mastermind. This is done by playing a single Doubler card on the Spy, reading it aloud and inserting the Spy's name like so: "Before I kill you, J. Robert Lucky, allow me to reveal the full extent of my depravity using this nutcracker and a copy of the Manchester Guardian." If successful, the value of a taunted Spy when killed is doubled, but a taunt can be foiled . . .

If another player has a Doubler marked with a letter that corresponds to the one played by the taunting mastermind, the taunt attempt fails. This allows the spy to escape and of course, blow up the lair as he leaves. Should the initial taunt be successful, it can be followed by a second attempt. This requires another Doubler card, but with a different letter, and if successful, will again double the spy's value. Successfully taunted spies are put aside along with any Doubler cards. Play continues like this until the deck runs out or a player scores 33 points.

The full-color makeover of *James Ernest's Totally Renamed Spy Game* really does make the game look good. The Lair cards are made to look like blue prints and the Spy cards are all individualized. And of course, the game play remains as good as it ever was, the strategies being simple to grasp. Send single spies into the small lairs of your rivals, and teams into larger ones. Build up and keep track of your own Lair's value to send Spies of just low enough value to get captured and with luck, taunt them. In the meantime, keep track of the Doublers that have been played so far. That way a player has some idea of what cards are safe to taunt with. The Bombs, imported from the *Better* edition of the original game, of course throw a spanner in the works by always blowing up a Lair.

Like many good games, the pleasure of *James Ernest's Totally Renamed Spy Game* from the roleplaying elements that can be added to its play. This is a chance for the players to ham it up, to put themselves in the place of a criminal mastermind, bad accent and all. At least that is, we hope, until the number of spies runs out. As good as it ever was, the "return" of *James Ernest's Totally Renamed Spy Game* is a more than welcome one, and all the better for being in color.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

LetterFlip

Published by [Out of the Box Publishing](#)

Designed by Ruddell Designs, Matt Mariani, Mark Alan Osterhaus, Al Waller, & Ellen Winter

Graphics by John Kovalic & Cathleen Quinn-Kinney

Two letterflippers, card tray, 150 two-sided word cards plus divider cards, rules; \$19.99

A lot of recent releases from Out of the Box Publishing have included plenty of gewgaws and seemingly unnecessary bits of equipment. While nice, these extras (a la *Whad'Ya Know?*'s bobble-head and *Easy Come, Easy Go*'s dice cup) usually served only to boost the cost and not necessarily the playability of games that could already be satisfying enough in their own right. **LetterFlip** is one of their most impressive kits to date as far as gadgets, but this time it looks like the extras are well worth the price tag.

The object of the game is to be the first person to guess all four of his words.

The game comes with two letterflippers. These are panels reminiscent of laptops, and they have the alphabet on tiles that flip up and down. Each player gets a card with four words, to be guessed by their opponent, which they slip into a slot along the side of their panel. Only one word is visible at a time, and players start with their three-letter words. They take turns trying to guess the letters in their word; if they guess wrong, they can eliminate that letter by flipping the corresponding tile face-down and the other player gets to guess. If they guess correctly, they pull a little tab out of that letter tile that shows how many times the letter appears in the word -- for example, if the word is "too" they would pull the tab up to show that "O" appears twice.

If a player has all the right letters from the word but can't unscramble them, they may ask a letter's position: "Is the first letter in my word 'A'?" Again, a correct answer lets you go again. If you suss out your three-letter word, you continue your turn by guessing letters in the four-letter word. This continues until someone has uncovered the five- and six-letter words as well, winning the game.

The equipment that comes in your box not only looks good but is useful and fun to fiddle with. The letterflippers are about 6" by 9" and maybe half an inch deep. They have three rows of letters that flip up and down; these can occasionally come loose, though they pop back in easily. They also may slip down when you touch them -- they don't tend to just fall over on their own, but if you fuss with them or are too fumble-fingered, they'll take that as a hint and drop. Each letter has a tab with little star symbols that extends from the back. These are used to show how many of each letter occur in your current word (and by clicking one star into view, you keep those tiles distinct from letters you simply haven't yet guessed). There is also a letter count flipper that, instead of stars, displays numbers three through six on its tab as a reminder of which word you're working on. Under all of this is the slot for your opponent's card, with a little window that shows which word he's working on.

It all seems a bit involved, and perhaps there's not much to recommend it over a simple game of Hangman, but you can take these devices just about anywhere, and the word cards give players a distinct, identifiable goal -- no arguments over what does and doesn't "count" or what can be used. What could have been troublesome gear is actually in good shape, and kids will certainly be thrilled playing with these gizmos. It's easy to play adult against youngster, since the word cards have color-coded standard and advanced sides. The categorizations are on-target, too.

Standard three-letter words include fairly mundane things like "ear" and "bed," while advanced has "rye" and "flu." At the top end, words like "pillow" face off against "velvet." And yet, for those who think the old *Wheel of Fortune* gambit ("R, S, T, L, N, E . . . ") is going to work: You're going to lose a lot of games.

The box is packed, there's no wasted space, and Out of the Box has thought to include everything but pencil and paper. Even the card decks have a place in the molded plastic insert, with the words "draw" and "discard" stamped on the insert so you remember which end is which. (A pair of divider cards show when it's time to reshuffle the decks.) Like a game of **Battleship** for the intellectual set, **LetterFlip** has all the elements of a classic family favorite: easy to learn, accessible to all ages, fun to play, and colorful . . . and it doesn't hurt to sneak a little learnin' in on them, either.

--Andy Vetromile

Of All the Gin Joints in All The World

Thoughts on NPC Appearances

by Brian Rogers

My brother and I are taking an after-dinner constitutional down our parent's rural street when a car screeches to a halt. A woman leaps out, yells my name and embraces me. She's an old friend from high school whom I've not seen in a decade. I get home, and receive e-mails from another intermittently contacted friend -- she's asking me for advice. The next night my strange and estranged ex-girlfriend calls to play catch up before asking after a mutual acquaintance's number.

What is happening? Are the dice hot on my "appear on a 4 or less" NPCs? (Naturally, I'm the PC in this scenario.) Did the GM find some plot threads that he hasn't played with in a while? Or does the triptych of distant female friends foreshadow something?

What're the Odds?

Random chance works. Life is chaotic, and we can never be sure who we'll run into or who's thinking of us. Rolls for dependants and enemies can act as a foundation (four enemies roll up, becoming the Super Enemies Squad, kidnapping the two dice-lucky dependants) or as a spice (Lord Crustacean threatens the city, but Daisy-Mae has said that if you miss this date, you're through) for a session or story arc.

When using random chance, it might be worthwhile to ascribe frequencies to the heroes' contacts and allies. These are often reciprocal relationships, with the PCs helping the ally out occasionally. Their cost might be reduced based on how often they expect help, but a good rule of thumb is asking for aid $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ as often as the character relies on them -- the player spent points on this after all, and going too far makes the NPC more of a dependant than an [ally](#).

Random chance is good because it keeps both you and the players on your toes. Scenarios will seldom unfold in a predictable way if totally unconnected factors [cross over](#). Another giant lobster slugfest can be much tougher if one hero's nemesis uses the distraction to drag him to a deathtrap. Random chance is equally bad because gaming groups have complexity limits -- too many unconnected things occurring at once and the players get lost in the mire, dragging down the scenario.

Stacking the Deck

Alternately, nothing is random. You've got a thematic or plot outline for the game, and the NPCs are going to turn up when and where you need them to advance those goals. Those pesky dice rolls won't overcomplicate the plot, change your carefully sculpted mood ("In the dark night, tracking the River City Slasher, our heroes come face to face with . . . the Confectionary Killer, and his high-carb weapons!" He just happened to be around, you admit sheepishly) or in any way diminish your storytelling.

When using the stacked deck method, it's a good idea to review the character sheets to see which NPCs haven't turned up in a while. Figure out which of them could slide into the story with minimal disruption. Including things that happen for no reason will keep players guessing, preventing them from meta-gaming your themes ("Daisy-May turned up; stock up on silver and garlic, guys, 'cause the supernatural always comes with her!") to disrupt the story.

Stacking the deck is good because it gives you greater control, gauging complication level and tailoring NPC appearances to the maximize player enjoyment. Those moments of revelation when the players spot a subtext and see that the narrative really is working on multiple levels is a great joy of GMing. Stacking the deck is equally bad when

you have too much control. That way lies railroading: the last thing anyone wants is for NPCs the players like being impossible to contact while ones they hate are front and center because that's how the GM wants it, player enjoyment be hanged.

Marking the Cards

As always, there are positions between the extremes.

- You fit in NPCs based on a combination of purchased frequency and story goals, so someone who turns up on an 11 or less will be on stage in half the episodes of the story arc. This works well for games with set endpoints or seasonal structures.
- Some NPCs are random, while those that the GM has tied most tightly into the plotline turn up when appropriate. Having dependents be random and enemies set is a good split, but it could also be that the team's major enemies are set and theme villains randomly add complication or lighten the mood.
- Random appearances equate to coming up in conversation: contacts can pass along word about Daisy-May being with some new guy, or discuss unseasonable lobster migrations. The NPC's existence is confirmed, but not made central.
- Asides or cut scenes can be used to show what the NPC is doing off screen. With Daisy-May paces her apartment, looking at the phone and weeping, the players have to know she's still in the picture, even if not on stage. Likewise, scenes of Lord Crustacean cackling as he pours over Russian submarine routes gives enough clues to make the players interested, but not enough to tell them exactly what's happening.

No matter how hard we try, our gaming world won't be as populated as real life -- no one has a list of every school acquaintance for possible roadside encounters. Games are always going to be stories, with the limited casts necessitated by the audience's [attention and memory](#) -- but they should not be so tightly constrained that every other phone call is the ex-girlfriend whose appearance always precipitates a social change. Sometimes it's enough to be aware of what methods we use to people our world, and how it might benefit from a little thematic randomness, like an e-mail from an old friend.

A Transparent Plea For Forgiveness

"The notes to The Waste Land! I had at first intended only to put down all the references for my quotations, with a view to spiking the guns of critics of my earlier poems who had accused me of plagiarism. Then, when it came time to print The Waste Land as a little book - for the poem on its first appearance in The Dial and in The Criterion had no notes whatever - it was discovered that the poem was inconveniently short, so I set to work to expand the notes, in order to provide a few more pages of printed matter, with the result that they became the remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship that is still on view to-day."

-- T.S. Eliot, "The Frontiers of Criticism"

Here is how I see Steven begin the process of editing an issue of *Pyramid*. He assembles a few finely honed and editorially shaped articles from a file, running rough word counts on each. Perhaps a theme has emerged, or can be brought to the fore with the deft choice of a "Supporting Cast" or "Appendix Z" submission. He smiles to himself as Pookie's review comes in, on time, on topic, and on word count. As a little reward, he peeks at the cartoon. Then, he takes out a very large bottle of cheap Canadian whiskey, pours a huge jelly-jar full, and downs it in one swig. He then types an email that reads something like this: "Where the hell is your column, you contemptible, impenetrable prima donna? Where? What is wrong with you? I have a day job, and a girlfriend, and games to run, and comic books to read! Just vomit up something about the Templars and send it to me -- nobody will know the difference anyhow given what you laughingly call your prose style. You hack." Then he deletes that email, and sends me one that asks when I expect "Suppressed Transmission" to be in this week, or if I expect it to be in this week at all, and could he perhaps know something, anything, about it before 3 a.m. Friday, pretty please with sugar on it? Then he drinks off the rest of the bottle and writes "Random Thought Table." When he wakes up at 4 a.m. Friday, he checks his email -- hurrah! No column from me! The magazine is 1,800 words short! All his work is for nothing! The whiskey bottle is empty! Somehow, regardless of my dereliction, he still puts together the magazine on word count and on time.

In the full and faithful knowledge that Steven deserves vastly better than that kind of shabby treatment, I proffer this transparent attempt to butter his T.S. Eliot-loving self up, and to express my warm regards for his editorial forbearance. (And let me assure Steven that, as he no doubt knows, any seeming note of whininess in this expression should be entirely blamed on [the original poem](#).) In my tradition of April Fool's doggerel, I call it "The Love Song of K. Allen Hite," and it goes a little something like this:

Let it go then, Steven please,

As my column notes are spread across my knees

Like a sandwich made while driving on the freeway;

It will go, through certain half-demented books,

By monomaniacal kooks

Of Knights Templar in ancient Baltimore

And dusty paperbacks with werewolf lore:

Books that wallow like a Sci-Fi channel show

From ghost to UFO

To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .

Oh, do not ask, "Where is it?"

I assure you, it's exquisite.

On the boards subscribers come and troll

Bitching about the weekly poll.

The columnist who pets his cat upon the long blue couch

The columnist who reads his comics on the long blue couch

Watches Dave into the corners of the evening,

Lingered upon the TiVo and its cartoons,

Let fall upon his desk the books thrown out by madmen,

Went to the kitchen, poured a glass of wine,

And seeing that it was a soft and pleasant night,

Wandered once about the house, and went online.

And indeed there will be time

For the columnist who pages through the text,

Filling his brain upon the long blue couch

There will be time, there will be time

To prepare to quote the next quotations he finds next;

There will be time to drivel and derail,

And time for all the blogs and magazines

That boldly swear that Elvis found the Grail;

Time for lots of channel flips,

And time yet for a hundred more red herrings,

And for a hundred thoughts that lose their bearings,

Before a break to get a Coke and chips.

On the boards subscribers come and troll

Bitching about the weekly poll.

And indeed there will be time

To wonder, "Will they care?" and, "Will they care?"

Time to delete the piece on Baudelaire,

And his connections to the Beings From Out There --

(They will say: "How his prose is growing slack!")

My opening quote, my intro purpling into black,

My historic background, controverted when I double back --

(They will say: "But how his logic falls so slack!")

Do I dare

Annoy the audience?

In a minute there is time

For red herrings so unerring that I might as well invent.

For I have made them up already, made up the lot: --

Made up the magics, deaths, conspiracies,

I have measured out my life with lunacies;

I know the path to madness in a made-up plot

Itself distilled from echoes of Umberto Eco's brain.

So how should I explain?

And I've made up the connections, made up the lot --

The links that tie Mu to kabbalah or MJ-12,

And when I've kabbalized poor Shakespeare, or the Earps,

When I've dragged in enough fill my spot,

Then should I mention **GURPS**?

Or tack on all the side trails of every djinn or elf?

And how should I explain?

And I have formed the myths already, made up the lot --

Myths lifted whole from Gimbutas and Graves

(And just a little Lovecraft from beneath the waves)

Is it Thursday deadline stress

That makes me so digress?

Myths that hint at deeper meanings, or advance the plot.

So how should I explain?

And should I mention **GURPS**?

* * * * *

Shall I say, I have paged at dusk through turgid books

And mapped the murk that rises from the minds

Of lonely men in fugue states, leaning out of logic?

I should have been a chap in tailored tweed

Writing poems with all the crap I read.

* * * * *

And the night, the midnight, sleeps so peacefully!

I pet my cat, not too athletic,

Lazy . . . tired . . . or apathetic,

Stretched on the couch, to purr and watch a DVD.

Should I, after swords and orcs and Gollum,

Have the strength to write the freaking column?

But though I have drunk a Red Bull, read and played,

Though I have surfed the Web (grown slightly strange) through pages weird and dirty,

I have no column -- and it's now 4:30;

I have seen my paragraphs grow limper,

And I have seen the eternal Steven check e-mail, and whimper,

And in short, it's still delayed.

And would it have been worth it, all the same,

After the Cokes, the popcorn, and the Lay's,

Among the comic books, among some tale of Blonds and Greys,

Would it have worked all right,

To have pounded out a column in one night,

To have teased the universe into a frame

To weave it in some subtle Reptoid pattern,

To say: "The game should vibrate to these chords,

Put myth and horror and Strangeness in your game" --

If one, calling up the column on the boards,
Should say: "All Hite's stuff just sounds the same.
I thought it kind of lame."
And would it have been worth it, all the same,
Would it have been all right
After the comets and the monsters and the rifled books,
After the poems, after the memoirs, after the facts that trail off unexplained --
And this, and more remained? --
It is impossible to say just what I'd bring
But say I'd parsed the Rosicrucians through *The Thing*:
Would it have been a plan
If one, summing up the issue for praise and blame,
And posting on the forums, should say:
"It still sounds kind of lame,
I would not use it in a game."

* * * * *

No! I am not Tim Powers, nor was meant to be;
Am a peripheral sort, one that will do
To add allusions, sketch a game or two,
Add alchemy or Kennedys to suit,
Conversational, without much point to make.
Skeptical, giddy, and affable;
Full of high strangeness, but a bit opaque;
At times, indeed, almost laughable --
Almost, at times, a hoot.
It grows late . . . it grows late . . .
I shall add a rambling quote from A.E. Waite.
Shall I even finish this? Do I dare to add John Dee?

I shall make up lurid nonsense, and hope no one will see.

I have read cool mermaid lore, in poetry.

I do not think that it will work tonight.

I could tie them into Sirius or Cybele

Or to Venus from the oyster-shell aborning

But I should probably have thought of that last morning.

I have lingered on the front page of the site

By Steven well assembled (with no staff)

Till I click on John Kovalic, and I laugh.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Practical Practical Jokes

How do you keep a FNORD busy for hours? Click [here](#).

Sorry about that; an oldie but a goodie, updated for the new millennium. And it serves as a segue into our main point: the practical joke.

Many game worlds have practical jokes and jokers as part of their backgrounds. They're especially common in the World of Darkness (at least, pre-reboot . . . I still haven't found the time to read up on the new stuff). The Ragabash from *Werewolf*, the Pooka from *Changeling*, and others. Practical jokers are also a common concept in other games or genres, ranging from the goofy such as the Superman villain Mxyzptlk to the (usually) somber Q from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Unfortunately, it's a concept that's often unpopular with players. This can be for a number of reasons, a few of which I'll touch on now in these handy-dandy playing tips for such characters.

Have a point. For some reason, many players (especially in LARPs) tend to play practical jokers as über-obnoxious joke-at-all-cost types . . . and then they wonder why they're unpopular with some players. In general, the stereotypical practical joker usually has some point or purpose behind their pranks. The most obvious one is to teach a lesson of some sort, which is the general motive behind the Ragabash, Mxyzptlk, and Q. Even when the actions are the same, the mere act of having a purpose (or at least claiming to) can go a long way toward making the actions less hated. Compare the two examples:

[Picard enters a room; a bucket of water falls on his head]

Picard: Q! What's the meaning of this?

Q: Uhhhh . . . I dunno. It's funny . . . I guess.

versus:

[Picard enters a room; a bucket of water falls on his head]

Picard: Q! What's the meaning of this?

Q: Oh, come, Picard . . . you and your precious Federation take yourselves so seriously. Could it be that you both aren't just . . . all wet?

Now, obviously this is a trivial example. But it expands to greater ones. For example, Q could easily turn the crew of the *Enterprise* into children for an adventure. But it would be more interesting if he did so while proclaiming how young humanity was, and how juvenile its assumptions are.

Be funny. With most practical jokers, a lot can be forgiven (by the players *and* characters) if the offensive actions are funny. For example, dumping an offensive werewolf character in hair remover to make them a hairless werewolf is pretty obnoxious, and probably not terribly amusing; the character (and player) may well balk at such treatment. But if the joker somehow had the jokee awaken in a pile of loose hair (the same color as his own), and then convinced various people to comment that they think the jokee is losing hair . . . well, suddenly it becomes more amusing. This is also because now the joke has become active; the jokee is a part of its development and progression, rather than reactive (meaning the jokee has no say in how it plays out). And if the character in question is vain, then that even satisfies the first bit of advice above!

If you can't be funny, try being strange. Finally, many practical jokes are more unusual than they are actually funny, and the best practical jokes are over-the-top unusual. Thus destroying a character's prized automobile isn't funny, it isn't strange, and it's obnoxious enough to get the practical joker killed. But disassembling the character's prized car and reassembling it inside a house (or office building . . . or dance club . . . or . . .) is at least somewhat amusing, although it's more unusual than anything. And even *more* unusual would be to keep pressing the joke: have a valet on hand offering to drive the character around the house. ("Do you wish to go to the bathroom, sir?") And compounding

that would be to somehow get duplicates of the character's car, putting one inside each room of the apartment. To press it further, maybe each duplicate car has its own valet. (Of course, the "real" car could be right where it was left . . . or it could be somewhere even more interesting.)

I'm sure there are a dozen more tips I could offer to make jokers more interesting . . . but I need to leave *something* for next year's installment. Nevertheless, if you're looking for more insight, I suggest going [here for more](#).

Nah, I knew you weren't going to fall for it.

* * *

Please note that I'm out of town until Tuesday, so if you're having problems contacting me or sending me the cauldron of gold doubloons, you'll know why.

--*Steven Marsh*

The International Supers Expo

by Steve Honeywell

Many professions have yearly conventions at which attendees gather to see new products, network with other professionals, and have a drink or ten after hours. In a world with supers, it stands to reason that there would also be supers conventions.

Enter the ISE.

The International Supers Expo is a four-day event held annually. At the convention, attending heroes can see the latest innovations in crime stopping techniques and technology, confer with other supers about new villains, and apply for openings on established super teams. After hours, convention goers vie for invitations to the best, most exclusive parties held by those established super teams and by manufacturers of gadgets. Less well-known or well-connected heroes unable to gain admittance to the best parties hit the bars or sit around the hotel pool and complain in their beer.

The ISE is designed with less serious supers campaigns in mind. More serious campaigns can use this as a lighthearted break between episodes of saving the world.

The ISE

The International Supers Expo, established in 1987, takes place every year in Las Vegas, NV in the second week of June. The show runs from Thursday to Sunday, starting at 9:00 a.m. and ending at 5:00 p.m. On Sunday, the show closes at 3:00 to give heroes the chance to catch a flight home. A European version of the ISE takes place simultaneously in Amsterdam. The event garners a lot of publicity, with news reports every night on some of the latest innovations in the field. Hotels surrounding the convention center are booked to capacity, with paparazzi outnumbering the attendees by a 3:1 ratio. (As a sample to base your own location on, printable maps of the Las Vegas Convention Center can be found at http://www.lasvegas24hours.com/meetings/lvcc_room_capacity.html.)

Security for both conventions is a bit slack, since the organizers figure that having that many super-powered people in one area should make it safe. The European show's security is a bit tighter, with armed guards manning all entrances to the convention floor. Use of super powers on the show floor is strictly forbidden, and the organizers have a large insurance policy just in case someone forgets. Using a super power, especially a flashy or offensive one, is grounds for being escorted off the premises. Repeat offenders are banned from the show for life.

Heroes are expected to attend in costume, and showing up in street clothes is a terrible faux pas. Attendees are given security passes that allow them onto the show floor. Having these passes in plain sight at all times is mandatory, and a hero unable to produce a badge when asked for it is shown the door. Struggles are seriously frowned on, and usually met with an armed response if deemed necessary by security.

The show floor itself is a sprawling maze of booths and exhibitions. Competing companies and super teams often set up their booths directly across from each other and attempt to blast the merits of their products or team at ear-shattering levels. Many companies hire scantily-clad women in tight costumes to attract more potential customers to their booths. The convention hall is noisy and crowded, making it difficult to communicate with anyone, even in the semi-privacy of a booth.

For a group of heroes attending the ISE, select as many of the following possible encounters and problems as you desire.

Transportation and Other Obvious Problems

For some heroes and groups, even getting to the show might be an issue. Some teams may have their own rocket planes, but others have no typical means of getting themselves across long distances. A group whose adventures take place in a particular neighborhood or city may have never had the need to travel across the country before.

Those able to fly under their own power have less of a problem, but the distances may be an issue. It's several thousand miles between New York and Las Vegas, which would tax the abilities or fuel supply of many a flier. Others may have more interesting problems. A super whose powers are radioactive may, for instance, have particular difficulty boarding an airplane when the plutonium that fuels his abilities sets off every alarm and detector in the airport. Even renting a car might be difficult for the underaged or those without any legitimate form of income or insurance.

Other problems that may be entertaining for some groups are simply the everyday annoyances of travel anywhere. Mechanical problems and weather can delay or cancel flights, overbooking can force the protagonists onto different flights, even traffic can cause them to miss their plane. And while forgetting to pack a toothbrush is hardly the stuff of epic stories, a stack of petty problems like this could easily set the tone for the convention to come.

Registration Problems

Plenty can happen between getting to the show and actually getting onto the convention floor. Just getting an entrance badge can be an adventure in itself.

Same Name, Different Hero

As previously mentioned, convention goers are given an identification badge, allowing them to roam the show floor. These badges are coded with the attendees' super identity, and are specified to match each hero. What this means is that once someone registers under a given hero name, that name is irrevocably assigned to his or her badge and cannot be given out to someone else. That person is that hero, at least as far as the ISE is concerned.

When the gang arrives to register for the show, randomly select one, pick the one with the most outrageous name, or choose the player you think can roleplay the situation the best. When that character attempts to register for the convention, his superhero moniker has already been taken by another super, and he can't register using that name. He'll have to register under a different identity, at least for this convention. For anyone protective of his identity, this spells personal disaster.

Only the Names Have Been Changed

A mischievous hacker or a technologically minded villain has broken into the ISE's computer system. Rather than doing anything too terrible, the culprit has merely switched all of the records around. Now, as people pick up their badges, they are being given identities that do not match them. The problem has thrown off the entire system, and no amount of complaining, bribery, or threatening will get anyone their proper badge. Give people the most unsuitable names you can devise.

Another possibility is that the hacker, rather than switching names around, has just changed the names themselves, altering the super identities on the registration list into something embarrassing or inappropriate. This can be a show-wide problem or confined just to the PC's badges. This is especially fun if the a previous foe retaliating for earlier defeats, especially if the heroes are hoping to impress particular attendees. Strutting around the show is easy when the badge says "Captain Chaos"; it's a little less so when the badge reads "Captain Codependent."

The Show Floor

Flare up in Aisle Three

Tech-Cor Systems is using the ISE to demonstrate its latest creation, the Urban Reconnaissance Patroller, Mach 23, or URP-23. The URP is a massive robotic construct designed and programmed to handle violent crime and security without putting lives at risk.

A team member is asked to help show off the capabilities of the machine on the show floor. The volunteer is selected to be apprehended by the URP-23. The robot's controller takes a few seconds to prepare the machine, telling the assembled crowd that he is activating it in non-lethal mode. Of course, he does the opposite, accidentally arming it to the teeth. Once activated, the URP-23 fixates on the poor chosen victim, sprouts a few dozen guns, and immediately turns homicidal, causing pandemonium.

The sad fact of the URP-23 is that it can't hit a moving target to save its circuits. The selected prey, provided he keeps moving, is perfectly safe. The same can't be said for anything near him. The rest of the team will need to deactivate the robot while the victim keeps moving. The URP will ignore anyone apart from its selected quarry, and will shoot to kill. As long as he keeps moving *at all* the target can't be hit. Describe a lot of near misses, burning scenery, and collateral damage.

Enterprising heroes may try to adjust the switches on the back of the URP. It's a good idea, but there are two dozen identical switches, and none are labeled. Virtually anything can happen with any toggle, from complete system shutdown, self-destruction, or a significant increase in rate of fire. The URP can withstand massive amounts of damage. Keep it running and gunning until it looks like the players are losing interest, then have it collapse in a big, messy heap.

In the aftermath, the URP's controller will blame the victim for the problem and will hold the heroes responsible for the machine's destruction. Convention officials will want a full account (and possibly a full cavity search) of all involved. Remember: even in life-and-death situations, the use of super powers on the show floor is forbidden, and those who use them to stop the machine will be cheered, congratulated, and escorted off the floor for the day.

The Price of Celebrity

A gadget manufacturer has spared no expense for this ISE, and is bringing in a well-known super to make a guest appearance at its booth. Several interesting possibilities are created.

- * The hero's glory days are well behind him, and he's become a bit senile. One of the PCs wears a costume a little too reminiscent of the guy's greatest nemesis. The party must keep their teammate safe from harm and find a way to restrain the old man without hurting him too much.

- * The team is hired to act as the hero's handlers. He's quite a bit different from his public persona. He may be an inveterate womanizer (fun for any female supers), a drunk, or just a demanding prima donna. On the other hand, if the hero has a gruff, angry reputation, he may be shy, retiring, or timid. In any event, everyone is in the position of needing to maintain his image no matter what, or face the wrath of their employer.

- * The hero fails to show up, causing a revolt of the convention goers who stood in line for two hours to meet him. Non-super conventioners may start reacting poorly to anyone in costume.

Super Team Shake-Up

A major super team is going through a period of reorganization. Most of the members have left and they are desperately looking for warm bodies to fill the spaces. Their recruiting program is aggressive in that they will resort to anything up to and including kidnapping to reluctant super to increase membership. A few of the possible scenarios are:

- * One member of the party is courted by the team, who tries everything to lure him away. The rest of the squad must protect their teammate without things erupting into a full-scale war. Or, two teams could vie for the same person, neither taking "no" for an answer.

* The entire party is courted. If they join, this gives you plenty of future possibilities for adventures, as the team is called upon by their new bosses at inopportune moments. (For GURPS, each new recruit should get both a Patron advantage and a Duty disadvantage). If the group opts not to join, it could provoke a battle as the desperate supers will not let so many prime candidates escape.

* The recruiter for the super team has had enough and is trying to find a way to leave. Perhaps the group of heroes that just walked past the booth needs another member.. This is a great way to add an NPC or a new character.

Other Problems

* The convention floor is confusing in the best situation, and it's always easy to get turned around and lost. If the show is poorly designed and laid out, getting from place to place can be a nightmare. Supers with flight powers will be sorely tempted to soar above the crowd, and will be quickly escorted off the premises once they land (no powers on the show floor!).

* A villain attacks the show, confident that the chaos caused by so many heroes will give him an advantage. This can be especially fun with a villain in possession of mind control abilities; hordes of zombie-like non-supers (some heavily armed and operating unique gadgets) can pose a real threat. Remember the URP-23? If it was repaired, it can make another appearance under the direction of its mentally enslaved operator.

* Long lines to get in, at the overpriced lunch counter, at the bathroom, and anywhere it's inconvenient. Any petty annoyance you can think of is applicable. It's easy to split up the group and have them waste time searching for each other. Someone insatiably curious or absent-minded will need to make frequent checks to **not** wander off and be lost in the crowd.

After Hours

Of course, a trade show is more than just spending time walking around the floor. When it winds down in the evening, there are dozens of events that take place, and each is ripe with possibilities for fun, mayhem, and significant embarrassment. For many, the real work at a convention takes place once the hall closes. Nighttime dinners, clandestine meetings, and wild parties are a part of every show, and the ISE is no different. Just because the floor is closed, there's no reason to let up on the heroes.

Most convention parties are relatively exclusive, or are at least by invitation only. These generally start the night before the show and go through late Saturday, with Thursday and Friday being the biggest nights. There are multiple events every evening, and each one vies to be the grandest and most memorable of the show.

No Ticket, No Entrance

While at the convention hall, the group makes contact with a man who claims to have a bunch of information about one of their biggest enemies or an ongoing problem. He tells them that he'll divulge the information that night at his company's shindig, and he'll put their names on the list so they can enter. He forgets, and the heroes are in the uncomfortable position of needing to crash a party protected by other supers to speak to the man.

On the other hand, he may have remembered, but may not be able to attend the function, forcing everyone to spend the evening searching through a crowded gathering looking for someone who isn't there. Regardless of how you spin it, the man in question is gone from the show for the rest of the convention, leaving questions about the information he was about to divulge. It's something they can follow up later, a plot hook you can use in the future if you need one.

The Special Super

One lucky convention goer is invited to an exclusive function, leaving the rest of the team behind. This works nicely

with **Super Team Shake-Up**, and gives the recruiting squad an edge in bringing the selected member onto their team. The rest are either left with nothing to do or finding a way to crash the party and get their friend out.

If the chosen recruit decides not to attend, he can expect the possibility of a search party looking to find him, snare him, and drag him off to have fun "for his own good." If he manages to escape, the show floor the next day is particularly hazardous as the now-snubbed agents of the super team are on the prowl to bring him into the fold. Barring that, they'll do everything they can to annoy and harass the unfortunate victim, attempting to get him banned from the ISE, either temporarily or on a more permanent basis.

Odd Heroes Out

A group of supers hasn't been invited to any after-hours functions. They retire to the hotel pool and get ripping drunk, then go on a destructive rampage. First they trash the hotel, then they move out into the city itself. The squad can encounter them in the middle of their spree, or, if they've also been left out of the festivities, can end up joining in on the mayhem. Or, rather than causing indiscriminate damage, the shunned team might gun for a particular party they were left out of, or a specific person who left them off the list. The issue can continue onto the show floor the next day, with spontaneous fights breaking out over who got an invite and who didn't. The heroes can either instigate these attacks, fall victim to them, or simply get caught in the middle as other supers start fighting.

Trouble at Home

The well-publicized nature of the ISE has one serious problem for the super hero community: bad guys read the paper, too. With the crimestoppers absent, a foe takes the opportunity to start his own criminal spree in the team's home town. ISE or not, it will hurt their reputation if they don't react quickly to the situation, but if they leave the ISE, they may not get back in time to find out some useful information or pick up new and valuable products.

If the lure of free stuff on the show floor isn't enough to keep them from leaving, arrange to have them making a guest appearance somewhere the next day, making them need to literally be in two places at once.

Super Tour Guides

If your team is based in Las Vegas, or if you move the ISE to their hometown, the heroes may be asked to act as official or unofficial hosts for high profile out-of-town notables. These people can be anything from foreign dignitaries to other supers. A few of the options are:

- The group must stop a crime in progress while shepherding a foreign diplomat. This person could want to get in on the action, putting himself in mortal danger. He may also run screaming, cower, and stand directly in the line of fire, putting himself in even more peril. Another possibility is that he completely misunderstands the events, gets in the way, blinds the heroes with inappropriate flash photography, and produces a constant stream of amusing, broken-English comments.
- The visitor (either super or non-super) wants to "see the town," which involves hitting every seedy dive and strip club in a five-mile radius. Someone must show him a good time and keep his (and their) name out of the police blotter and the tabloids. This is quite a challenge, considering the presence of thousands of paparazzi looking for a juicy story.
- The team is given a promise by the ISE that they will be reimbursed for any expenses incurred, provided they bring a receipt. Their charge runs up huge bills in expensive restaurants and clubs, insisting his protectors join him in the revelry. First, they'll need to find a way to pay for his excess. Second, the ISE will come through with compensation, but will only cover the costs of the guest. This is no problem for a wealthy hero, but those struggling ones will be paying off these bills for months.

Attack of the Fanboys

Unbeknownst to the group, they have achieved some sort of cult or celebrity status (perhaps because of their encounter

with the URP-23 or some other event at the show). Now, whenever they go anywhere outside of the conventional hall, they are besieged by a horde of fanboys, star-struck groupies, photographers, and wannabees. While all of the attention might be flattering at first, it severely restricts the movements of the party, possibly cutting seriously into their nighttime activities. The coverage and constant attention continues for at least the length of the show, and may carry over to the return trip and the weeks beyond.

At first, all of the media attention should be favorable, with everybody depicted as all that is right and good with the super hero world. Depending on their reaction to all of the media attention, after a day or two, the stories can turn nastier, with tabloids digging up past indiscretions (or making them up out of whole cloth as necessary). Rather than asking softball questions, reporters will ask for statements about the latest allegations. Regardless of the media's ultimate slant, the hordes of fanboys should persist, getting in the way at every opportunity, looking for autographs, attempting to garner advice about becoming supers in their own right, and possibly committing crimes for the honor of being captured by their idols.

Other Problems

A major convention presents its own set of logistical problems for a city, from long waits in restaurants to overcrowded cabs and buses. Conventions also have a seedier side, and even one that seems to come with pure motives will have a criminal element. While some villains will use the ISE to cause chaos at home, others see it as the perfect chance to attack their main foils when those heroes are out of their element and don't necessarily have the backing of the local police department. These nemeses will attack at the most problematic moments you can devise, such as when the PCs are in the company of people they need to protect. If the attack comes while the heroes are on the show floor, keep in mind that the bad guys aren't part of the convention and have no compunction about using their powers, while the team is still in a position where they can't. (Or course, they could simply leave the convention hall and fight outside, but you don't need to remind them of that.)

The ISE Into the Future

Conventions have a tendency to get larger, more elaborate, and wilder, at least in established industries. Companies try to outdo not only themselves from previous years, but also their competition. Future ISEs will be larger, noisier, and more confusing, with wilder parties and more complicated booths on the show floor.

The ISE can easily become a yearly event in a supers campaign. In truth, only the details change from year to year. Every show will have product demos that go terribly wrong, parties no one can get invited to, and mile-long lines for the restroom. Just keep in mind that anything that can go wrong should go wrong, provided the results are entertaining.

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



More Questions than Answers

City of Zeroes

By Chris Aylott

They got me. I held out as long as I could, but the Massively Multiplayer Online RolePlaying Games finally got me.

Truth be told, my resistance was on the passive side. I've always liked computer roleplaying games, and the idea of playing online with friends always sounded like fun. The only thing that kept me from trying MMORPGs years ago was lack of time and wussy computer hardware.

That's changed in the last year. I finally have a home computer with decent graphics and an online connection fast enough to be worth playing on. And so, more nights than not, I kiss the World's Greatest Baby and Her Amazing Mother good night, fire up **City of Heroes**, and Fight Crime in Paragon City.

I love **City of Heroes**, even if its villains don't love me. (Ow. Looks like the Skulls have Mr. Tut searching the floor for his contacts again.) So I should be thrilled to see that Eden Studios is making a pen and paper RPG based on the game, right? I should be excited that I'm going to get to sell Alderac's **City of Heroes CCG**, right? Right?

Well, I am. Kind of. But I also have a little Spidey-Sense sitting on my shoulder whispering, "Who's Professor Zooming who here?" And as I pause to wonder why my Spidey-Sense reads DC, some math rolls into my head.

"3x2(9yz)4a!"

Bruce Sterling Woodcock runs mmogchart.com, a website devoted to tracking the subscriber bases of popular massively multiplayer online games. As of February 2005, he puts the subscriber base of **City of Heroes** at about 125,000. That's an order of magnitude below **World of Warcraft's** projected 1.25 million subscribers, but it's still a respectable competitor in the MMORPG field.

(The subscriber difference between **City of Heroes**, **World of Warcraft**, and the even more popular Asian fantasy MMORPGs **Lineage** and **Lineage II** is worth considering if you're making a non-fantasy pen-and-paper RPG. No wonder nobody ever gets close to **Dungeons and Dragons** -- and more on that anon.)

125,000 people paying \$15 a month to play **City of Heroes** is \$1.875 million in income per month. Not a bad chunk of change for NCSoft, the publisher of the game. So what is the RPG and CCG version going to add to that?

Let's start with the RPG. A successful RPG licensed from a popular television show or a computer game can sell 15,000 to 20,000 copies. Licensing royalties tend to run about 5% of cover price, and we can figure the **City of Heroes** rulebook will cost about 40 dollars. Five percent of \$40 is two dollars, multiplied by 20,000 . . . looks like NC Soft will make about \$40,000 from the main rulebook. That's not bad earnings for a legal document and a few hours of approval checking, but it's chump change next to what the company is making from subscribers.

Eden and NCSoft can always hope for the pen-and-paper RPG to be more successful, and it sounds like they're taking steps to make the product more appealing to the game's online players. Eden has already announced that the main rulebook will include a code for a "special prestige power" usable in the online computer game. However, even if every one of **City of Heroes's** 125,000 subscribers buys the book -- an unlikely outcome -- the license would only yield a quarter million dollars for NCSoft. Good money, but still a small percentage of one month's subscriber income.

Trading card game sales are much more difficult to predict. The **Pokémon** trading card game has sold over 10 billion cards, but that's **Pokémon**, and **City of Heroes** isn't going to get anywhere close to that. I've been told that reasonably

successful second-tier CCGs can expect to do about \$5 million per year at retail. If so, NCSoft may be looking at about \$250,000 per year in licensing royalties for the card game. Two hundred and fifty grand is just as good as it was in the previous paragraph, and it's still a tiny percentage of overall revenues.

There's a lot of room for error in the numbers above. It's hard enough getting sales figures for games (even when you agree not to attribute the source), and using those sales figures to predict the success of a new game is a chancy proposition at best. But the numbers we do have make it certain that when we talk about licensing revenue for ***City of Heroes***, we're talking about tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars, not millions.

And that begs a question. Since ***City of Heroes*** is already a multi-million dollar enterprise, why pursue such small amounts of revenue? What's in it for NCSoft?

Seduction of the Innocent

From here on out, the numbers are completely speculative. I'm making wild-eyed guesses here, so feel free to mock me and pelt me with garbage. That said, tell me if this scenario makes sense to you.

Let's say that the ***City of Heroes RPG*** sells 15,000 copies, and that about half of those copies get used in a game at least once. (The other half get put in little shrines and debated on RPG.net.) Your typical gaming group has about five players in it, and it's not unusual for two or three of those five players -- The GM, and The Guy Who Buys Everything, and The Other Guy -- to get the books. If that's the case, then it's not unreasonable to suppose that there may be 3,000 games of ***City of Heroes*** going on in the next year or two.

In your typical gaming group, you have one or two players who already love the subject matter, and one player who kind of likes it. You also have one or two players who don't really know anything about the subject. They learn the game because they're playing in the group. The newbie players are the ones I'm interested in for this argument.

Roleplaying games thrive because groups of friends like to play together. So do MMORPGs. The ***City of Heroes RPG*** gives a fan of the online game a chance to share something he loves with his tabletop friends. And if a group of friends enjoys playing together offline, why wouldn't they want to get together online as well?

Let's go back to that "special prestige power" NCSoft is offering as a reward for purchasing the book. Signing up for the power lets NCSoft know that you have the book, and that you might have friends who would be interested in the game. If I were NCSoft, I'd be planning to give everybody who registers their book some free subscription codes so that the book owners' friends can try out the online game for free.

NCSoft has already used the free trial subscription offer this year as a "Valentine's Day gift" to current subscribers. The offer let folks who were curious about ***City of Heroes*** try out the game without forking over \$50 for the game CD. No hassles, and you had a month of free play before your credit card was charged.

Did this offer work? It certainly worked on me. And if the RPG results in 3,000 tabletop game groups getting together to play ***City of Heroes***, and if one person from each of those groups then signs up as a new subscriber . . . that's \$540,000 of new revenue per year, just from the RPG. It's like selling the license all over again every month.

There's the money. The CCG is likely to have an even larger base to appeal to, and should sign up even more subscribers. The revenue from new subscriptions is almost certain to dwarf any revenue gotten from the licensed products themselves.

The ***City of Heroes*** CCG and RPG are not a diversification of NCSoft's intellectual property. They are advertising that NCSoft gets paid for, and that is a sweet deal.

Maxwell Lord Salutes You

As a Mammon-loving profit-grubber, I'm all for deals like these. However, there is also a part of me that wonders if we are all about to get too much of a good deal. Here's why.

A few weeks ago, I was talking to a customer in the store. I wasn't too surprised to learn that he too had recently tried out his first MMORPG. (In his case, it's **World of Warcraft**.) What surprised me was when he said, "Yeah, I've even stopped playing **Legend of the Five Rings**."

Now, this guy was a hardcore L5R CCG fan. Played in all the big regional tournaments, played in a weekly group at another store, bought lots of cards there and even bought some from me when the impulse took him. Stopped playing it? That's the last thing I expected to hear, so I pushed a little for the reason. He told me, "Hey, **World of Warcraft** is 15 bucks a month, and when I was playing **Legend of the Five Rings** I was paying that every week just for snacks."

Fifteen bucks a month. Always available, full of people to play with, and the games are finally good enough to hold the attention of the typical tabletop RPG fan.

I think we have a new predator in the jungle. And that it is starting to eat the tabletop RPG hobby's lunch.

Last quarter, game stores across the country were reporting sales slumps of 20, 30, sometimes even 40 percent. How much of that was bad weather? How much of that was a lack of interesting releases? How much of that was because Joe RPG Gamer was holed up in his den playing **World of Warcraft**?

What's worrisome is that the current MMORPGs may just be the leading edge of the storm. What happens when **Dungeons & Dragons Online** is released?

"Fools! Tremble before the might of Doom!"

There have been over 50 computer games based on **Dungeons & Dragons**, a pretty good indicator of the brand's appeal. **Baldur's Gate** and **Neverwinter Nights** recorded sales of two to three million copies, comparable to the sales of **Warcraft III**. It's not hard to believe that **Dungeons & Dragons Online** will find at least a million subscribers, maybe more.

(Of course, this presumes that the game Does Not Suck. If it does suck, all bets are off.)

One million subscribers, 15 million dollars a month, \$180,000,000 dollars a year. It's impossible to tell what percentage of this revenue will go to Wizards of the Coast, but consider this.

Wizards of the Coast has said that between 2000 and 2003, it sold over one million copies total of the **Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook**, the **Dungeon Master's Guide**, and the **Monster Manual**. At wholesale, that's about \$12 million over three years. If Wizards of the Coast gets even a small percentage of the likely sales from **Dungeons & Dragons Online**, it will make more money from the MMORPG than it makes from the rulebooks. The tail is quite likely to start wagging the dog.

What happens if pen-and-paper **Dungeons and Dragons** becomes "advertising that pays" for the online game? How will Wizards of the Coast handle the inevitable inconsistencies between **Dungeons & Dragons** in its current form and its adaptation into an MMORPG? If the pen-and-paper game exists to promote the more profitable computer game, shouldn't Wizards of the Coast alter the original so that it does a better job of selling the adaptation?

And what about the tabletop RPG community? What happens if gaming groups start shifting their action online? Other RPG companies have always depended on capturing disaffected **Dungeons & Dragons** players -- what happens if the path through **Dungeons & Dragons** leads towards other computer games and not other tabletop games?

Is it possible that **Dungeons & Dragons Online** will become the *real* **Dungeons & Dragons**?

Object Lessons

An Enchanted Collection for *Call of Cthulhu d20*

by Nicholas Luna

This is a collection of enchanted items that, on the face, seem rather mundane; simple items that one could find in an antique store, pawn shop, or perhaps at auction. The items are presented in a three-part format. The first section, *Public Information*, details the "known" history of the item; when and where it originates and who has owned it, and a description of the item. The second section, *GM Information*, details the actual history of the item and the statistics for game use. The third section, *Adventure Ideas*, describes one or two plot hooks; ideas for introducing the item into the game.

Antique Baoding Iron Balls

Public Information

Lee Shan, noted Chinese craftsman, made this set of Baoding Iron Balls (iron or steel balls used for healing and meditation) in 1894. Lee Shan's son Wang secretly immigrated to America in 1915, and brought the balls with him. Wang built a successful business selling hand-crafted Chinese art, including Baoding iron balls. The original set is still with the Lee family.

This set consists of two solid steel balls, each 1.4 inches in diameter. Each ball weighs 6.5 ounces and is painted cobalt blue. One ball has a painting of a red-skinned, winged creature. The creature appears gaunt, almost skeletal. The other has a similar creature painted on it, but the creature is colored with gold instead of red. Oddly, even though the balls are solid, they produce sounds in the same manner as newer, hollow Baoding balls. The red creature ball sounds a high tone, and the gold creature ball sounds a low tone. The set comes in a light brown hard wood case, lined with crimson silk.

GM Information

A Chinese sorcerer-priest originally commissioned this set of Baoding balls. During the creation process, the priest helped Lee Shan create the set by infusing them with magical energy. The sorcerer died before he could receive the set, so Lee Shan kept the balls. When his son Wang decided to go to America, Shan sent the balls with him as a good luck charm.

This set of Baoding Iron Balls was designed to aid in focus and concentration, specifically when used in spell casting. To use the balls, a character must first learn the correct pattern for moving the balls. This requires a Research skill check against DC 25. Once the pattern is learned, the character can attempt to use the balls when casting a spell. This requires a Dexterity check against DC 16. If successful, the Sanity and ability score losses associated with the casting of the spell are reduced by one point each (to a minimum of one point). Using the balls in this manner requires that more time be spent casting the spell. A spell that is normally cast with one action takes one full round to cast. A spell that normally takes one full round to cast takes one minute to cast with the balls. A spell normally taking one minute takes two. If the spell normally takes more than 30 minutes to cast, the character must roll a Constitution check. The DC for this check is the casting time minus 30 minutes. For example, if the character tried to cast the *banishment of yde etad* spell, while using the balls, the Constitution check DC would be 30 (60 minutes normal casting time - 30).

It is possible that other sound patterns, allowing for additional effects, exist or can be created.

Weight: 1.5 lbs., 2 lbs. including case; Study Time: 3d6 days.

Adventure Idea

An occultist acquaintance of one of the characters has come into possession of one of the balls, and requests the heroes' aid in recovering the missing sphere.

Bronze Lantern

Public Information

This well-maintained candle lantern once belonged to Angus MacGavin, a New York City resident in the 1890s. MacGavin was known to locals as "Angus Dead-Talker" as a result of the time he spent in cemeteries, speaking with the deceased. Although considered odd, locals believed MacGavin to be a harmless old man. When MacGavin died, the lantern was taken by a local constable, Sean Hughes, and the lantern remains with his family to this day.

This is a three-sided bronze lantern. It is 10 inches in height, and each face is six inches wide. Two sides are solid, while the third has a removable glass plate. The top includes a wound copper loop for hanging. The lantern is unadorned, except for the name "Angus MacGavin" etched on the bottom in a childlike script.

GM Information

Angus MacGavin was odd indeed, but far from harmless. MacGavin was responsible for nearly 60 disappearances over a period of seven years. Men, women, and children all fell to his needs. Angus possessed an obsession with corpses. He exhumed them, took them home, and performed bizarre acts and rituals with them. He considered the corpses his family and friends. One of his more peculiar hobbies was mixing and matching body parts, creating strange new companions. Over the years, Angus learned of several means to animate the dead. Angus built the lantern to aid in this task, and he kidnapped people to fuel the lantern.

To use the lantern, a character must burn in it candles rendered from relatively fresh human fat. The power of the candle is based on the fat burned. When fat from an adult is used (adult being defined as 13 years or older), the lantern summons all animated corpses within one mile. These corpses are not under the control of the lantern-bearer. They simply respond to the call. Unless they have contrary orders, 50% of the summoned corpses will wander about aimlessly, while the other 50% will attack the lantern-bearer.

If the fat from a child is used (12 years old or younger), the lantern will animate up to 20 HD of corpses, assuming that the target corpses are within 100 feet, as if using the *black binding* spell. When the lantern is used to animate corpses, the character does not require any material components (a black gem), nor does he have to touch the target corpses. A typical candle burns for one hour.

Weight: 2 lbs.; Study Time: 4d4 days.

Adventure Ideas

- Cemeteries all over the city are losing corpses. If the PCs access police information, they find that the authorities are at a dead end concerning the matter. Graveside tracks indicate that the corpses are walking away on their own, but that is obviously impossible. In fact, the lantern is being used by Shawn Michaels, a young man who is currently under the domination of Angus MacGavin's ghost.
- A PC detective is charged with locating several children who disappeared recently. The only thing in common the children have is that they are all under the age of 10, and all belong to poor families. A necromancer, who possesses the lantern, and has learned its secrets, is abducting the children.

Chinese Statue

Public Information

This unusual artifact was discovered in 1939 in the tomb of a 14th century Chinese warlord. For several years, the Chinese government kept the statue in storage, until, in an unusual move, the government sold the statue to wealthy American businessman, Eldon Sinclair.

Sinclair died in 1968 while at sea; authorities believed that he had been surprised by a sudden squall and lost control of his yacht. The Sinclair family sold the statue to the Los Angeles Museum of Ancient Curiosities. Recently, a fire destroyed the Museum and tragically took the life of two employees. The statue, and a handful of other objects, survived the fire.

The statue is a beautiful work of art, unusual in that there are no marks or other indications of the craftsman. It is carved from a single piece of dark mottled green jade (nephrite). It vaguely resembles an octopus with its tentacles spread out equally, forming a circular pattern. The main body is elevated with a human-like face on the side. The face has deep set eyes, set with tiny pearls, a small nose, and thin, tight-lipped mouth. Surrounding the mouth are what appear to be dozens of tiny tentacles.

GM Information

In 1372, Chang Long -- a minor Chinese warlord -- had this statue commissioned shortly after he began to suffer from debilitating nightmares. A trusted priest worked with a local craftsman to create this artifact. Much to Chang's relief, the statue worked, and his nightmares ceased. Although his nightmares ended, Chang never forgot them. He firmly believed that whatever the cause of the nightmares, it would someday attempt to claim him again, even in the afterlife, so he ordered the statue entombed with his body.

In 1951, Eldon Sinclair -- a very successful businessman with a more than passing interest in the occult -- began to suffer from intense nightmares. After attempting several different means to end the nightmares, Sinclair turned to the occult. His research turned up information on the statue. Using occult techniques, he managed to convince the right Chinese officials to sell him the statue for an amount far beneath the actual value. Once he gained the statue, the nightmares ceased. Unfortunately for Sinclair, his research failed to reveal that the statue was cursed. The curse took effect one day when Sinclair was yachting, resulting in his death.

Cthulhu often sends dreams to mortal men, dreams that can drive the recipients to insanity. This statue is designed to provide protection from these dreams. Whenever a person sleeps within five feet of the statue, he is immune to any effect or contact that is sleep-based, such as Cthulhu's dreams, or a *nightmare* spell. Cthulhu is vaguely aware of the protections provided by this artifact and is angered by it. Whenever the owner of this artifact ventures out to sea, there is a (non-cumulative) 5% chance per day that one or more sea-going creatures will rise from the sea to assault the owner.

Weight: 5 lbs.; Study Time: 1d2 days.

Adventure Idea

A friend of one of the characters begins to suffer from violent, intense nightmares, often involving drowning, usually at the claws of something awful. He asks the character for help, and their research leads them to the statue, which is in the possession of a local antiquarian or cultist. Of course, the current owner is not willing to give up the statue.

Colt Peacemakers

Public Information

This matched set of Colt Single Action Army revolvers originally belonged to Tommy "Thunder" Johnson, a

gunfighter of little fame. What fame he did have was due to the perception that he was most likely insane. Thunder Johnson died in 1889, and his killer, George "Black Lightning" Jefferson, claimed the six-shooters. The guns passed through many hands over the years, coincidentally ending up in the possession of Thunder Johnson's grandson, who, in 1979, willed the guns to his granddaughter Clarissa.

Each handgun is 11 inches long, and weighs 2.4 pounds. The barrels are 5.5 inches long. The guns are nickel-plated with ivory grips. Each grip has an unusual gold inlay in the shape of a slightly skewed five-pointed star. In the center of each star is an oval shape. The guns are chambered for .45 caliber Long Colt ammunition.

GM Information

In 1875, a Navaho shaman, in search of a champion, approached Tommy Johnson, and introduced him to the world of the mystical. He explained the many dangers posed to mankind, and asked that Tommy aid the battle against the forthcoming darkness. Tommy, a good man at heart, agreed. Together, Tommy and the shaman enchanted the two revolvers, empowering them to fight against mystical beings. Tommy, in his quest against the darkness, turned to alcohol, and frequently spoke of the threats and horrors he faced. This was the cause of his reputation of insanity.

These handguns are treated as +2 weapons for the purposes of ignoring damage reduction. There is a touch of sympathetic magic involved. Whenever a character deals damage with one of these firearms, he suffers subdual damage equal to one point per die of weapon damage, so a standard shot with one of these guns inflicts 2 points of subdual damage. A critical hit would inflict (2×3) 6 points of subdual damage. The weapons inflict a fraction of their damage as pain on the wielder to remind him that, even though he battles monsters, he is still inflicting pain and suffering, and should always be on guard against becoming that which he fights.

Weight: 2.4 lbs. each; Study Time: 1 day.

Adventure Idea

The PCs are hired by Clarissa Johnson to investigate poltergeist activities in her home. These activities are caused by the ghost of Thunder Johnson, and will cease only when someone swears to take up his original cause.

Dynamite Jones Cane

Public Information

In recent years, the black exploitation films of the 1970s have enjoyed a renewed popularity. The most popular of these films is a series featuring the hero Dynamite Jones, a hard-hitting, and hard-loving, private investigator. Dynamite's arch-nemesis is a pimp known as Black Stick. Stick's name was drawn from the signature black cane he always carried with him. Black Stick is the feature villain in three Dynamite Jones pictures: *Dynamite Jones*, *Son of Dynamite*, and *Dynamite is Alright!* In the last film, the character of Black Stick died after being impaled on his own cane.

Chris Marley, the actor who played Black Stick, owned the cane and kept it after the last movie. In 1984, Marley was convicted on three counts of murder, and is now serving multiple life sentences. During the investigation into his crimes, it was discovered that he had an extensive criminal history, and had been, in fact, a pimp. After his conviction, his family took possession of the cane and sold it as memorabilia.

The cane is polished black oak, 36 inches long and four pounds, with a brass tip. Midway along the shaft are two decorative gold rings. The head (handle) is brass, straight, with a skull at the end. The skull has two small diamonds set in the eyes. When the handle is twisted slightly and pulled, a 30-inch sword blade is released from the shaft.

GM Information

Known on the streets as Big Daddy Hard Pump, Chris Marley had a reputation as a fierce and brutal man, willing to beat a person down at the drop of a hat. He beat several of his prostitutes to death over the years. One of those women had been the granddaughter of a Haitian sorcerer. When the sorcerer learned of his granddaughter's death, and of the man responsible, he set about creating this item. Two years after his granddaughter's death, the old man presented the cane to Marley as a present. Once Marley accepted the gift, the sorcerer returned home and committed suicide. This finished the enchanting of the cane and sealed the magic.

A character can use this cane as a club (equal to a baseball bat) or a fencing foil. While the cane is in hand, the character has the benefit of damage reduction 1/- (this stacks with existing damage reduction), and receives a +2 circumstance bonus to Bluff and Diplomacy checks. In addition, while the cane is in hand, the character receives a +6 circumstance bonus to Intimidate checks. When the cane is used as a club, the character must roll a Will save against DC 15 on his first successful strike. If the save is successful, there is no effect, but the save must be checked again on each successful hit. If the save fails at anytime, the character flies into a rage, attacking the target savagely until the victim is dead or the character is somehow restrained. This experience causes the character to lose 1d3 Sanity.

In addition to the abilities and effects listed previously, possession of the cane has a deteriorating effect on the owner. For every six months that a person owns the cane, there is a 15% chance that he will permanently lose one point from either his Strength or Constitution.

The creator of the cane did not intend for the item to have any additional side-effects, but his subconscious dislike of the films in which Marley starred influenced his sorcery. The result is that the character using the cane suffers from a powerful urge to wear extravagant and tasteless clothing, with a particular preference for furs, bright colors, and gaudy jewelry. In effect, he dresses like a pimp from those blaxploitation films.

Weight: 4 lbs.; Study Time: 2d6 days.

Adventure Idea

Someone known to the characters begins to act strange, displaying mannerisms never before seen. He begins to disappear for days at a time, and starts to abandon his friends. If followed he is going to the seedier side of town and engaging in an illegal enterprise, and is quickly developing a harsh street reputation. The PCs will have to stop him before the local gangs or law enforcement comes down on him.

Galactic Battles Radiant Blade Prop

Public Information

Galactic Battles, the first of three blockbuster movies about a rebellion against an oppressive intergalactic empire, premiered in 1980, and changed the way movies would be made. Although the third movie premiered in 1988, fans did not forget the trilogy, and have anxiously awaited the renewal of the franchise.

Galactic Battles introduced the ascetic Masi order of warriors and spiritualists. The chosen weapon of the Masi is the *Radiant Blade*, a weapon of pure energy. This item is the actual radiant blade prop used by the film's imposing villain, Thoth Izzu. The director originally gave this prop to his friend Johnny Mason. Always a generous man, Mason donated this to an auction to raise money for the homeless. Thomas Tarrant purchased the prop. Tragically, Tarrant died recently, and his family, hoping to bring some joy from the tragedy, donated the prop to another auction to raise money for the poor in Cambodia. The current owner and whereabouts of the radiant blade prop are unknown.

The prop is 12 inches long and constructed from high-impact plastic. Aluminum rings cap each end, and there are various aluminum fittings along the shaft. The activation button is red plastic, and actually depresses. The basket-guard is black plastic, with silver fittings. The blade end contains a small purple stone that resembles an amethyst.

GM Information

The creator of *Galactic Battles*, Gregory Light, is a worshipper of the Old Ones. He designs his movies to subtly introduce the Old Ones to the public. He called upon inhuman aid to write the movies and design the technology found in them. When he designed the blueprint for this prop, he unwittingly incorporated the design of an ancient mystical weapon. When the prop master built the item, through the influence of an otherworldly being, he incorporated the necessary elements to complete the enchantment.

To activate this item, a character must cast a *fist of yog-sothoth* spell on it. This is a rare exception to the "one creature" target requirement of the spell. When the spell is cast, a three-foot long purple shaft of energy appears from one end of the prop. The prop may now be used as a weapon that deals 3d6 damage, or 3d8 subdual damage, determined when the spell is cast. The wielder's health powers the weapon; for every round that the blade is active, the character suffers one point of damage. To use the blade with skill, the character must have the melee weapon proficiency.

Weight: 1/2 lb.; Study Time: 3d4 days.

Adventure Idea

The characters hear of a new cult in town, a cult based on the Masi of the famous films. A relative, or a relative of a friend, has ended up in this cult. The investigator must investigate the cult, which is led by the possessor of the blade. The cult leader has vile intentions for the members of the cult, and the PCs must find a way to stop him.

Gold and Silver Stopwatch

Public Information

G&G Smith of London built this timepiece at the behest of Will Morris, an English gentleman. Morris died in a tragic accident two years after receiving the watch, and his wife Elisabeth gained it and the rest of his property. Elisabeth found the watch to be a painful reminder of her loss and sold it to a surgeon, Eldon Richards. Richards willed to watch to his dear friend Mary Hanson. The watch remained in the Hanson family until 1941 when it was lost in a fire that took the lives of the remaining Hanson family members.

The watch is palm-size, with an outer case of silver. The case is engraved with unusual symbols that do not appear to belong to any particular language. The inner decorative plates are gold, and engraved with images of fantastic creatures, and 30 small lines. The inner workings are brass and steel. The interior bears the mark of G&G Smith of London.

GM Information

William Morris was an occultist who gained the attention of a Hound of Tindalos while peering back in time. Morris knew he had only a short time before the Hound tracked him down, so he turned to G&G Smith of London. The clock-makers were legitimate, but they were also known to craft enchanted devices in addition to their standard items. The watch served its purpose and blocked the ability of a Hound to track victims for short periods of time. Unfortunately, Morris became obsessive about setting the watch and was run down by a carriage while crossing the street as he set the watch.

This watch acts as a protective device. It is marked with 30 small lines; these are second marks. A character can set the watch to count down 30 seconds; during these 30 seconds, a Hound of Tindalos cannot track or sense the character in any way. Setting the watch takes a move action.

Weight: 3/4 lbs.; Study Time: 2d6 weeks.

Adventure Ideas

- A friend of a PC attracts the attention of a Hound of Tindalos, and pleads with the character to help him avoid the fate that is coming. The PC's research turns vague information about the watch. The PC and his friend have a limited time to acquire the watch or have a similar device commissioned.
- A character in possession of the watch, but ignorant of its properties, becomes the target of an occultist who mistakenly believes that the watch will provide control over a Hound of Tindalos.

Matha Beli

for *GURPS Infinite Worlds*

by Phil Masters

Infinity Unlimited maintains a number of agents on the version of Earth known as "Ezcalli" (see *GURPS Infinite Worlds*, p. 122), most of them working to achieve some kind of long-term suppression of the unpleasant Tenochca Empire. The most promising rival power is the Christian Songhay Empire of Africa, industrialised and fully aware of the threat it faces, and Infinity has a number of offices in Songhay territory, observing and considering options while they conduct a little low-level trade and watch out for Centrum intrusions.

However, one such office, in the city of Carthage, was seriously surprised, and not a little disturbed, to receive a visitor -- a local, who clearly wasn't taken in for a minute by their claims to be a very minor trading-house. Not that she knew what they were, exactly, but she walked through the door, sat down -- and asked.

It turned out that this "Matha Beli," an academic, the widow of a minor mercantile clan leader, had been watching them -- without telling anybody else, thank God -- for some time. She was clearly a very fine scholar and social scientist, but that wasn't what had led her to see right through their carefully-designed camouflage like it was made of gauze. So far as Infinity can tell, with all their careful tests and analyses, and after days of polite interviews, she has one of the most powerful intuitive facilities they've ever met. (Some of them wonder if she's a latent psionic, but the best available tests say no, for what little that's worth.) She can more or less walk into a room, look at a crowd of people, and say who's involved in any kind of deep subterfuge, including especially cross-time operations -- or glance at a news report and assess with uncanny precision whether there's anything worth Infinity's attention in the incident described. She's also plain good with people.

Well, Infinity had two choices there; recruit her or send her to Coventry. And if you think that the Council would waste an intelligence asset with this potential value, you don't know much. So she was taken on board -- exactly as she seems to have anticipated, blast her.

Once given access to Infinity's training facilities, she quickly mastered the technical side of TL8 historical research, and brought her academic knowledge up to Infinity standards in a matter of months, devouring any book that could assist her work. She might subsequently have been kept at HQ, reading papers and filing reports, but she soon became quite insistent that she wanted to see the infinite worlds in person. She claims to work best that way, but actually, she seems to have some kind of academic ambition which calls for a lot of field work. This sometimes annoys those people who've come to regard her as Infinity's best source of information on Ezcalli; they'd be *really* annoyed to lose her permanently.

(Note; Beli doesn't have the Expert Skill of Cliodynamics, as defined in *GURPS Infinite Worlds*, for the simple reason that she has studied several more advanced skills which it covers in greater depth. She can perform very effective cliodynamic analysis by Infinity's standards, mostly using Economics, Intelligence Analysis, or Sociology.)

For game purposes, she can in fact have ended up in either of two specific positions:

Patrol Officer: The Patrol doesn't normally recruit out-time staff, and certainly wouldn't put unknown factors in positions of authority, but Beli is *good* -- her threat assessments and local cliodynamic analyses are among the most reliable going. The I-Cops still don't give her a command position as such, but her *advice* tends to end up with some of the force of high-level orders. (This version of the character might lose the Legal Enforcement Powers, though.)

I-Cop PCs may encounter Beli around HQ, in which case, they should quickly learn to respect her situational assessments and background briefings; her tendency to cross-examine them at extreme length during debrief sessions, and to make seemingly arbitrary associations and snap judgments, are small prices to pay. In any case, she has a great

deal of rather motherly charm.

She also has a slight tendency to personal bias in her advice, but probably not much that will clash with I-Cops' own preferences too badly. She isn't actually prejudiced against the military as such, but she may show some irritation at individuals who seem too think that uniforms make them better people. Likewise, she'll usually advise supporting independence movements and decentralized cultures against empires and conquerors, if that position is reasonably justifiable.

She may also insist on joining field operations in person from time to time, claiming that she works better with data that she can collect in person. Given her empathetic talents, this is quite true -- but field missions are also a way of assuaging her intense curiosity. If she comes on a mission, PC I-Cops who are also along will be firmly instructed to keep her safe and secure; failure to obey this instruction would be an extremely career-limiting option.

ISWAT Member: Alternatively, and perhaps more plausibly, given just how good (and worrying) she is, the Council could have snaffled her for its own staff, and ultimately attached her to ISWAT. She could even be used as a PC in an ISWAT campaign, if the player didn't mind a character who is superb in social situations and as a field analyst but much less use in a fight. However, she's more likely to appear as an NPC advisor, analyst, and general plot device. Again, the teams she works with have clear instructions to take care of her - - and to keep a *very* close eye on her. For one of the weakest combatants in ISWAT, she's got a lot of people surprisingly scared.

In either case, if PCs are working with Beli in the field, note that she has basic combat training and a very cool head, but she really isn't a fighter; if shooting starts, it's best to get her into cover as soon as possible. In more peaceful social situations, she can be a real asset to any team, especially if she speaks the local language; her practical "people skills" are almost unmatched. Her ethnicity and sex may represent a problem in some timelines, but she can slip into the role of "quiet servant" with ease, from where she may be even better placed to observe important events. Indeed, she can sometimes act as a very effective infiltrator and spy, if her companions are willing for her to take the risk.

Her Illuminated advantage gives her the very useful instinctive ability to spot out-timer agents and conspirators, but it also makes it possible for other Illuminated characters to spot *her*. This has never inconvenienced her before now, but if she ever ran into, say, a major Cabal operation, things could rapidly become complicated -- and she might need a lot of protection. (Note; some GMs might not wish to introduce this advantage in an Infinite Worlds campaign -- in which case, it's easy enough to delete it and rely on her exceptional intelligence, perceptiveness, and skills to achieve much the same result with a little more effort and time.)

Matha Beli (250 points)

At first glance, Beli is often taken for an unremarkable, slightly matronly black woman in her early 40s (she's actually 42), although many people notice her habitual thoughtful expression. Her charisma mostly emerges in conversation. For preference, she dresses in a "generic West African" style, with long, colorful dresses incorporating headscarves -- but she is very adaptable when she needs to be.

ST 8 [-20]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 16 [120]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 8 [0]; Will 16 [0]; Per 16 [0]; FP 12 [0].

Basic Speed 6.00 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.

SM 0 (5'3" tall); weight 110 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 8.

CF: Songhay/Ezcalli [0]; Cultural Adaptability [10].

Languages: Songhay (Native) [0]; English (Accented) [4]; Hotinohsavannah (Broken/Accented) [3]; Mongol (Broken/Accented) [3]; Nahuatl (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Charisma +2 [10]; Empathy [15]; Illuminated [15]; Indomitable [15]; Intuition [15]; Legal Enforcement Powers [15]; Status +1 (Academic) [5]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages

Curious (9) [-7]; Duty (Almost All the Time, Extremely Hazardous) [-20]; Obsession (Building a Comprehensive Theory of Alternate History) (12) [-10]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Struggling [-10].

Quirks: Dislikes imperialism (-1 or worse reactions to imperialistic characters, tends to advise against helping expanding empires); Much prefers beer to wine (may cause bemusement at posh parties); Responsive; Thinks "military honor" is a delusion (condescends somewhat to career soldiers, reacts badly to idealistic speeches about military chivalry or the like). [-4]

Skills

Acting-17 (IQ+1) [4]
Anthropology-14 (IQ-2) [1]
Archaeology-14 (IQ-2) [1]
Diplomacy-15 (IQ-1) [2]
Economics-14 (IQ-2) [1]
First Aid/TL8-17 (IQ+1) [2]
History (Modern Ezcalli Military)-14 (IQ-2) [1]
History (Modern Homeline Political)-14 (IQ-2) [1]
Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-11 (DX) [1]
Housekeeping-16 (IQ) [1]
Intelligence Analysis/TL8-15 (IQ-1) [2]
Linguistics-15 (IQ-1) [2]
Merchant-15 (IQ-1) [1]
Occultism-16 (IQ) [2]
Politics-16 (IQ) [2]
Psychology (Human)-16 (IQ) [4]
Research/TL8-16 (IQ) [2]
Savoir-Faire (High Society)-17 (IQ+1) [2]
Shadowing-15 (IQ-1) [1]
Sociology-16 (IQ) [4].

Appendix Z

Six Ways to Build a Mystery

P.D. Magnus

It's easy to think that a mystery adventure should be like this: An NPC plans and executes an almost perfect crime. PCs begin to investigate, following leads and assembling clues until they are able to catch the NPC villain. There's a furious showdown with the villain at the end. (For advice on GMing adventures that fit this formula, see ["How To Run A Mystery Adventure."](#)) The crime-to-showdown formula can make for a fun adventure, but there are other ways to build a mystery. Cue the Sarah McLachlan as you consider consider the following.

1. Sometimes the PCs won't solve the mystery.

Especially if there is only a slender thread of evidence that connects the villain to the crime, the players may just not see what you thinks is obvious. Try to allow for some resolution besides the marathon game session that [doesn't end](#) until the players figure it out. In a pulp adventure, the villain might eventually send the PCs a note mocking their incompetence. In a Freakazoidesque superhero world, the chief of police might just send a memo to the PCs informing them where the final showdown is going to be held. But for most settings, allowing for failure means that a final showdown just might not happen.

2. Critical clues should never depend on skill rolls.

If you expect the players to follow a slender thread of evidence, you shouldn't deny them some of the evidence because of poor luck. The easiest way to handle this is just to tell the players what they discover using their investigative skills. If you insist on requiring die rolls, the rolls shouldn't do any more than determine *how quickly* the PCs discover the clues -- they might notice it immediately, or they might only notice it the next day.

3. Sometimes villains aren't the scheming type.

In real life, many crimes are committed by people who aren't clever or who act rashly. If the mystery centers around this kind of criminal, you don't need to plan the perfect crime and then figure out where the villain went wrong. Given enough time, perhaps a trained chimp would be able to find the murderer -- but the PCs don't necessarily have that much time and may have other pressing matters to attend to.

4. Sometimes the mystery is just a subplot.

People get murdered and things get stolen all the time. The PCs may have more important things to worry about. Mysteries can make good subplots in adventures that would be to linear otherwise. If you don't want the mystery to be a complete red herring, you can have it connect in some way to the main action without being essential to it. The PCs don't have to solve the mystery, but solving it may give them some advantage in their central pursuits -- perhaps the thief also has an artifact that will help them navigate the catacombs.

5. With a roomful of suspects, somebody must be guilty.

In the drawing room tradition of mystery fiction, things start out with a number of plausible suspects each with a hidden motive for the crime. You can run mystery adventures in the same way: Plan a crime and develop several possible perpetrators, each with a back story that can come out over the course of the adventure. Fill in the details as the players investigate and, if they do a good job, let the suspect they finger be the guilty party. This sort of plotting after the fact needs to be kept hidden from the players -- at least while you're doing it -- so it may help to set the

partly-improvised adventure in a campaign with other mysteries that have predetermined solutions.

6. There doesn't need to be a showdown.

If the criminal is an ordinary guy rather than a costumed villain, then catching him may be a mere formality. Even if the PCs must race to the train station to stop the villain from fleeing, that doesn't need to involve gunfire and screeching tires. Perhaps it's just a matter of alerting the border guards.

Pyramid Review

Über Goober

A Scum Crew Pictures Production

Produced & directed by Steve Metze

Edited by David Hobizal

Music by Pat Murray & Luke Ski

87-minute DVD; \$20.00

Games continue to break out of their tuck boxes and hardbound books and make the leap to screens big and small. *The Gamers* and its upcoming sequel deal with the activities at the game table from a pseudo-fictional point of view, but a bookend piece by another group, *Über Goober*, is a documentary-style film about the lives and habits of games and gamers. Its scope isn't limited to roleplaying games; it covers miniatures and LARPs as well.

This DVD from Scum Crew Pictures tags most of the bases, including interviews with various figures from the industry -- Mike Stackpole, Peter Adkison, Gary Gygax (though curiously, Dave Arneson doesn't appear) -- but even these are kept to a minimum. The spotlight falls mostly on those who keep the hobby going day-to-day: the fans themselves. We're given a cross-section of these folks, including the guy who creates Egyptian miniatures using sand from his kids' sandbox; the policeman who designs dungeons during downtime; and the motley crew that engages in massive mock battles on the weekend.

Interviews are interspersed with footage taken from panels featuring some of the notables, and there are a few conversations with random passersby as the director assesses the popular view of roleplaying and roleplayers. These segments are hardly as damning as one might think -- which is not to say the general public's concept of gamers is accurate, but many disclose more curiosity about and subtle interest in the hobby than you would guess. Then again, there are those parties, given equal time, who do not possess much enthusiasm for roleplaying. Some religious authorities like Bob Larson offer their views on the downside of gaming, and the more notorious news items and urban myths are revisited, while stock footage of industry front man Mike Stackpole is on hand to speak to these criticisms. The slow insinuation of games into popular media is also touched on briefly.

Along the way, we hear familiar stories. What the games are, how they came about, who plays what. Some of it is old ground, but it is a documentary. By deftly choosing which fans to use in the film, creator Steve Metze shows what it's like to grow up gamer, or be introduced to it by one's parents, or to meet the significant other through shared appreciation of the hobby. Some interviewees give their testimony in the dark, like mafia informants, but most are up-front and willing to share what games have meant to them. Piece it together, and you have an anecdotal but educational narrative that not only talks about what games are but, as the title suggests, what gamers are.

Extras include a brief look at the crew, extended man-on-the-street interviews, a longer conversation with Gary Gygax, and a road trip hosted by the old man himself as he takes the filmmaker down memory lane, sharing the locations that played a big part in the then-nascent business. These include Gygax's old house (where the sets were originally put together), a couple of the old "office" buildings, and even the first GenCon locale. Though they won't be marketing the sparse music anytime soon, Luke Ski provides a few of his more amusing songs for the soundtrack.

Metze's exploration of his subject does seem thorough, though at times the geek in him hampers his editing ability.

Some sequences go on a bit long, revealing that even he may be more interested in some parts than his presumably sympathetic audience. The on-the-street interviews are odd in that they occasionally have subtitles, in part to make up for the lousy sound recording possibilities on the pavement. These are by no means consistent, and those portions of subtitled dialogue are at least as easy (or hard) to understand as those conversations that don't get subtitles. The extras include "unexpurgated" interviews, with the salty language intact, yet some of the sailor talk is still in the regular segments. Some of it is bleeped out in the audio, some isn't . . . and where it isn't, the subtitles mark out the iffier bits with "****." It's as though they have three different people of varying moral dispositions handling the individual interview tasks.

Nevertheless, *Über Goober* is an engaging film, and is comforting in its treatment. Not only will fans of the genre feel at home seeing others with whom they identify, the movie points out to any "mundane" who cares to listen, through simple exposition unmarred by overt personal biases, that gamers of any ilk are as normal, varied, and sympathetic as any other subject placed under a potentially unflattering lens.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Shadows of Yog-Sothoth (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by John Carnahan, John Scott Clegg, Ed Gore, Marc Hutchison, Randy McCall, Sandy Petersen, & Ted Shelton with Lynn Willis, Jeff Carey, & Don Coatar

Cover by Tom Sullivan

Illustrated by Tom Sullivan with Milet Michel & Andy Hopp

Cartography by Charlie Krank & Badger McInnes

176-page perfect bound black and white book; \$23.95

***Editor's Note:** This review has a number of spoilers relating to the adventure, and those who are expected to play through it are advised not to read it. In addition, it is rumored that reading this review aloud will force an ancient ritual further along its inevitable progression, leading no doubt to a world that is a twisted, barren shell of its former self.*

Do with this information what you will.

In the annals of scenario and campaign design, the importance of Chaosium's ***Shadows of Yog-Sothoth*** should not be underestimated. The very first release for [Call of Cthulhu](#) in 1982, it paved the way for what are regarded as campaign classics. Not just ***Masks of Nyarlathotep*** and [Beyond the Mountains of Madness](#), but also Pagan Publishing's [Walker in the Wastes](#) and [Realm of Shadows](#), as well as ***The Enemy Within*** campaign for ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay***. What it introduced was the concept of the onionskin campaign. As the player characters or investigators played through each part of the campaign, it stripped away another layer of the onion or information. This revealed more of the evil cult's plans and took them closer to the heart of the adventure.

In ***Shadows of Yog-Sothoth***, that cult is the Masters of the Silver Twilight, an international organization dedicated to a single aim. Dread Cthulhu sleeps still in the sunken city of R'lyeh, yet stirs as the stars converge. Even though they are not quite right, the cult believes it can force the premature rise of the city and release of the Great Old One. The campaign against the cult is broken into seven parts, taking the investigators from Boston to New York, then Scotland, California, Maine, and finally Easter Island and the South Pacific.

Nominally set in 1928, the campaign opens in Boston, with the investigators invited to join "The Hermetic Order of the Silver Twilight," a rich, well-to-do, and misogynistic fraternity with a reputation for doing charitable works. At first it seems innocent enough, but events hint otherwise, and are then revealed when the characters are promoted above the publicly known ranks. They are told that the Order acknowledges no earthly god, but alien deities awaiting the time when the stars come right and they can reclaim the Earth that was once theirs. It is of course, up to the

investigators to put an end to this insane madness.

Although a letter in the first part links it to the third, "The Coven of Cannich," another letter takes the characters to New York. It tells them of a business organization called "Look to the Future," which through strange actualization ceremonies, it seems able to send individuals into the future who return with fascinating items. These, such as pocket-sized radios and cooking pans that never stick, seem to prove it possible, but why does everyone seem so tired? The investigators are further directed to the third act and Scotland by another letter that asks them to look into the disappearance of a noted American big game hunter and archaeologist from his village home of Cannich. There the characters must contend with suspicious locals as well as strange foreigners working at a loch-side dig. Where "Look to the Future" is short and focussed, "The Coven of Cannich" is a sprawling affair with almost 20 NPCs for the Keeper to handle. There is also a lack of urgency to the adventure despite the events it suggests and the Keeper is very much left on his own to cope.

One more letter draws the investigators back to America and Hollywood for the fourth part, "Devil's Canyon." A movie mogul wants them to investigate what befell the set of his latest movie that caused the director's suicide, the lead actress' death, and lead actor's madness. The set is located in an isolated valley in the Mojave Desert, where the characters are menaced by forgotten links to a lost Indian tribe. The next letter takes them to Maine and the fifth part. Not for nothing is this called "The Worm that Walks," as it sends them into the arms of a benefactor who directs them into a trio of lethal encounters. This is the cult's revenge, its chance to get back at the investigators for their meddling.

One *last* letter sends the heroes to the Chilean port of Valparaiso, where a cult leader has been sighted preparing ships to sail for the Eastern Pacific. "The Watchers of Easter Island" and the "Rise of R'lyeh" represent the players' first chance to be pro-active rather than reactive. With artifacts acquired in previous adventures and final clues learned on Easter Island, the investigators face what is the ultimate challenge in ***Call of Cthulhu***. They must step onto the newly risen island of R'lyeh and prevent the early release of the being at the very heart of both the game and the Mythos, Cthulhu himself.

Originally published in 1982, and reprinted in 1989 as part of ***Cthulhu Classics***, this campaign has long been out of print. It returns 15 years on in a new edition that is essentially a straight reprint with slight alterations. It is *not* the expanded version that Chaosium promised but could not deliver for financial reasons. This is a great shame, for the campaign has many problems.

From the outset, the campaign set-up is weak, making it difficult for even experienced investigators -- for which it is designed -- to get involved. The links between the scenarios are flimsy and awkward to augment, and the constant use of the letter as a plot device is wearisome. The fifth part, "The Worm that Walks" is also notorious for it being designed as an exercise to kill player characters at a point when their knowledge and experience is needed for the last two scenarios. There is almost no Keeper advice, which when combined with the various parts being written by different hands, gives ***Shadows of Yog-Sothoth*** a rough, incohesive feel.

On the plus side, Chaosium has attempted to address *some* of these problems. This begins with "The Hermetic Order of the Silver Twilight," providing suggestions on how to get the investigators involved, essentially asking why they would join, and four NPCs to interact with who are not protagonists. All major NPCs have thumbnail portraits, which the original lacked, and each chapter lists the links between it and the other chapters. Another welcome addition is actual advice on how to run each chapter, but it still stands in isolation and is often too superficial to be any use.

The book has also been given a serious makeover in keeping with Chaosium's now house-style. Less intrusive than in the recent ***Call of Cthulhu Sixth Edition***, mostly because it is done on white rather than grey pages. Still, the style template retains its use of drop capitals that constantly obscures the text below to irritating effect.

Elsewhere, the artistic and cartographic makeover has been carried out to mostly negative effect. The NPC thumbnails are welcome, but the other new artwork is bland, adding nothing to the book's look. In fact, the headers of each page have better artwork. Worse still are the maps, nearly all mishandled, having all been darkened unnecessarily, making them difficult to use. In the case of the maps of Boston and Scotland, they are too dark, too small, and a waste of space.

The overall impression of this new edition of ***Shadows of Yog-Sothoth*** is one of disappointment, and Chaosium have done a disservice to the two segments of the audience it is aiming the book at. Long time ***Call of Cthulhu*** devotees will be dismayed at the lack of changes to what is regarded as a rough campaign. Newer fans might find the campaign's old-style nature intriguing, but will be equally dismayed *and* daunted at the lack of polish and advice.

An appendix contains two separate scenarios included with the original. The first is "The People of the Monolith," an atmospheric introductory adventure that could benefit from information from [*The Keeper's Companion*](#). "The Warren" is the second, a Boston-set adventure with a weak introduction; while it is combat heavy, has a nastily effective climax.

Another curious aspect of this edition is that it is double the length of the original with little new material. Further in comparison, the price of the 1989 reprint, which replaced "People of the Monolith" with four other scenarios, was \$18.95, against this edition's \$23.95. To be blunt, it could be argued that this reprint does not offer value for money.

This is not Scott David Aniolowski's much-anticipated reworking and expansion, but another fussy makeover of an original with some effort made to smooth of its now dated and rough edges. Even then, this is only effective in the first part. While it is good to see this campaign back in print, it is ultimately disappointing, and there is something quite mercenary about this edition of ***Shadows of Yog-Sothoth***.

--Matthew Pook

Countdown to Odds 'n' Ends

Given that I've been trying to juggle about a half-dozen balls more than normal – as the foul and mysterious odor in my kitchen can attest – this column might be more disjointed than normal . . . meaning it's only a few sexual references shy of looking like automatic writing with attention deficit syndrome. Caveat Reader.

* * *

Last week I drove for the first time in the Tampa/St. Petersburg area. This region, on the Florida west coast, is built on and around bunches of islands. While driving there, I noticed a few signs I'd never noticed anywhere else, such as "BEWARE OF HIGH WINDS" and "LONG BRIDGE: CHECK GAS." After a while I was wondering what other odd signs I'd encounter:

DANGER: LOUD CRICKETS

BURNING DANDRUFF ZONE

MAKE SURE SNACKS ARE FRESH

To tie it into gaming, I couldn't help but wonder the mischief if a dungeon had two signs posted in front. The first is in Elvish:

DO NOT BRING FOOD OF ANY TYPE INTO THIS DUNGEON

The second is in Dwarvish:

BE SURE TO BRING AN OFFERING OF FOOD FOR THE MONSTROID OR FACE THE CONSEQUENCES.

Your move, heroes.

* * *

While waiting for some stubborn software to install this week, I read DC Comics' *Countdown to Infinite Crisis*. I think it's the first comic I've read in a couple of months, and it's an "event book" in the best (and possibly worst) sense of the phrase. I dug it, although I can see how folks wouldn't.

For those of you who aren't familiar with it, the comic is noteworthy because it's kind of a "first hit's free" approach to a comic-book event. It's an 80-page comic – complete with a cover painted by fan-favorite Alex Ross over fan-favorite Jim Lee's pencils – for only one dollar. I'll be roping this book back into gaming sometime soon, I imagine, because it sparked a number of thoughts. But I'll dissect one random thought at present.

I don't have access to DC's numbers . . . either their budget or their publishing quantities. (I realized, after calling their offices several times and asking for Batman, I had made a common mistake: I should have asked for THE Batman.) Anyway, I'm sure they're losing money by offering an 80-page comic for a dollar. The question is, how close are they? They're obviously hoping to stimulate demand for their other products, and sell a huge number of this specific comic (which, if it went for the usual \$5.95 price tag, would have a much smaller demand). It's possible for the numbers to work out such that DC didn't lose too much money on this project; it's even feasible they made a sliver of a profit (although not enough of one to justify this in any way other than a publicity stunt).

Having been tied to the gaming industry full-time of late, I find myself wondering what it would take to get the numbers to work out for something similar in the gaming biz. Oh, I know that we've made a number of attempts. I detailed some of them in a previous column. Most of them have centered around free offers: free "Lite" versions of games and the like. Others have offered free downloads of full games (such as the *Ars Magica Fourth Edition* offer from Atlas Games a couple of years ago).

While this is good from a certain perspective, it faces a number of obstacles, mostly centered around cost, volume, and distributorship. Cost and volume are intertwined; the RPG market just isn't big enough to support the high volumes necessary to lose some (but not a lot) of money on a project, while getting that money back in new and returning customers. Even if your average non-first-tier RPG was able to double its sales by such a stunt, you'd be looking at numbers in the 10,000 range or so.

Distributorship is a curious beast in the RPG world. Consider that distributors make their money by taking a percentage of the cost of the item from retailers; a free (or low-cost) RPG doesn't take any less processing than a more expensive one – and, in fact, may require more – but the money the distributor makes is reduced. Couple this with the fact that most publishers and distributors offer free shipping to those who meet certain ordering thresholds, and it can be a recipe for a *lot* of money spent on shipping without the distributors making money off it. (I think that's why distributors also seem to favor more expensive books; per unit, they make more.)

The other major obstacle is determining what this bite-sized piece should be. Comics have the advantage of offering a complete story (or something approaching it) within a single "preview" issue, *and* make folks hungry for more. RPGs don't necessarily have the same compartmentability, especially if a rule set needs to be included. The two best efforts I've ever seen have been White Wolf's preview/adventure booklets on the one hand, and the [Fighting Fantasy-type books](#) on the other (which can also tell a complete story). Even so, it would seem if any company had hit upon a "magic bullet" that promoted their stuff and made a profit, we'd see more of them.

Other media have successfully dealt with this, mostly because of the lower cost of the media involved. CDs and DVDs can be pressed for pennies apiece, meaning free distribution of songs, video game demos, and even television episodes is limited mostly by the cost of including them in good outlets.

This is a random-sized bite because it's a work in progress, and I don't even pretend to have any answers.

* * *

If I ever run a modern-day set game again, I think one of the things I'm going to do is have a "major" story break during a quiet news period, only to serve as a smokescreen for the "real" cause of the adventure.

SCIAVO, POPE STILL DEAD

Other news: Uruguay Launches Giant Robot, Starts Clone Wars

* * *

That's it for this installment. Having been out of town for almost a week, I'm playing catch-up with various mail and other fiddly bits, so if I'm a little slow in replying you'll know why. And if you want to add your thoughts to the pile, feel free to send them to pyramid@sjgames.com.

--Steven Marsh

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Monkey Mutterings

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

NOTE: This "Campaign in a Box" is slightly different -- the "Box" today is a soapbox.

Recently, I had to go over my [Atomic Sock Monkey Press](#) (ASMP) receipts for taxes and business license renewal, so I had a bunch of numbers on hand. During an online discussion with some other industry folks, Steve Jackson suggested that refining some of my comments from that might make an interesting "Campaign in a Box."

So, here we are.

Monkey Business (Practices)

Let me give you some rough disclosure on ASMP practices and business matters. Any numbers mentioned do not include money made on other freelancing gigs (like, say, this column).

ASMP shares qualities with other game publishers in the RPG industry, and varies greatly in others. Like most publishers, it has its own catalog of products, often written or otherwise produced by someone on the masthead. It is (relatively) small and underfunded as an entertainment producer, and generates written products aimed at gamers who enjoy the roleplaying hobby.

However, ASMP has little to no presence in the hobby game distribution network, and sells its PDF and Print on Demand (PoD) products exclusively through two online storefronts: [RPGNow.com](#) and [e23.com](#). While more and more publishers -- small and large -- are going this route, PDF and PoD products are still just a blip on many gaming customers' radars.

Quick rundown (industry): Publishers create product, printers print the product, distributors distribute product to retailers, retailers sell product. That's how your typical Game X gets from Publisher Y to Local Game Store Z. There are four main reasons why I haven't pursued getting into the "distribution channel." These reasons are (in rough order):

1. Possession of an understanding of the distribution system;
2. Capital to pay for large print runs;
3. A sizable catalog of products; and
4. An aggressive release schedule.

When I started ASMP, I had none of these things; it's arguable right now, after more than a year of operation, whether I have as yet achieved any of them.

My grand business strategy is not to run ASMP at a loss, ever. I avoid using credit or accruing debt; this includes using my credit cards for ASMP expenses. Partially, this is a personal foible, but it also has a bottom-line rationale. ASMP is sole proprietorship, with a Doing Business As (DBA) name; a DBA is essentially a legal alias for me to do business with a corporate face. As a sole proprietorship, I am liable for any debts that ASMP runs up. I have enough to worry about with personal bills and student loans and such without adding business issues -- like additional interest and finance charges -- onto the heap. My profit and loss statement and cash flow statement are the same thing. Luckily, I don't amortize development costs over print runs, nor do I have to worry about inventory, warehousing fees, administration costs, and so forth.

I had an initial investment before launch (a sizable check from a freelance writing job), which I used to set up the ASMP website, square away my business license and DBA, purchase cover art, and pay for the first RPGMall print run (see below) for **Dead Inside**. I immediately repaid it out of my first month's profits. Since then, ASMP has

garnered a small amount of profit each month. . . which I sink back into the company for the next month's costs. ASMP's monthly costs involve advertising, networking costs, professional development fees, and -- until recently -- small PoD runs.

Quick rundown (PoD): Initially, under the aegis of the RPGNow-associated RPGMall, I had to pay to get very small print runs of books made up, which were then held in inventory for customer orders. It really wasn't "true" PoD, you could consider it "Print on Publisher's Demand." With the change in RPGNow.com's PoD process to Lulu.com, this cost has gone away -- no upfront fees for print runs. Heck, no print runs per se. The current system is actually "Print on Customer's Demand."

How does all of this work in putting together a game?

Monkey in the Middle (of Production)

First, I write a book and playtest it with my local group to work the egregious kinks out. Then, I collect various other playtest groups and "peer reviewers" to take the manuscript out for a spin or two; I've generally used Yahoo Groups to host the mailing lists and playtest files. After that comes revision of the text to patch holes, fix mistakes, and add any new chrome that's shown up in the interplay and discussions with playtesters. At some point in here, I commission cover and interior art. When the revision is done, I send the final draft of manuscript to an editor.

Quick rundown (art): I look for stuff that I'd like to see in the book, something that seems to click with the words. Frankly, when I was doing ***Dead Inside***, I didn't have a firm enough grasp on exactly how to express to the artist exactly what I wanted, and didn't realize how hard-assed I needed to be to get it. I also was in an (inexplicable) hurry, and allowed this drive to get the game out there as soon as possible to cloud my judgment. I went with the attitude of "close enough" -- and now I believe this was an error. Lastly, I had much less of an understanding of how to use the graphic technologies at my disposal -- which, when you consider my current state of understanding, is pretty laughable.

So, while there are pieces in ***Dead Inside*** I really should have kicked back for a few more revisions, I take full responsibility for the way the book looks. The illustrations really are fairly close to the tone I wanted the art in the game to have; if I had to do it over again, it'd look sharper and clearer, and would rely much more on the text. If you compare ***Dead Inside*** to the ***Cold, Hard World*** supplement, I believe there is some improvement in the art direction.

Quick rundown (editing): I'm an editor in my day-job. Despite that, I wouldn't try to edit my own writing alone. You need fresh eyes to catch errors that you gloss over without noticing; your brain often fills in gaps automatically. That's why I tap someone who's an editor in his day-job as well. And mistakes can still get through.

Quick rundown (paying for art & editing): Other than printing, art can be the biggest expense of a project. Since ASMP is run on a shoestring of funds, this is a huge concern. I go with two options (or a mix of the two options) for purchasing art: 1) flat fee; or 2) profit sharing. *Flat fee* is simply paying the artist for the artwork and rights, and Bob's your uncle. *Profit sharing* means that the artist gets a cut of the money I make on a product (see below, *Monkey Money*). Generally, I go with flat fee for cover art, and profit-sharing for interior art and editorial work.

Once I have an edited draft and art in hand, I start laying out the product. Balancing columns of text with graphical and text elements, making sure the sections get broken right, tweaking the pagination, all that stuff. When I'm happy with the layout, I publish to PDF.

At that point, I start looking for reviewers for the product; reviews -- both good and not-so-good -- are great ways to catch the gaming public's eye at relatively little expense. Meanwhile, I set up all the arrangements and product information with RPGNow and e23. Recently added into this loop is setting up the product for RPGNow's new PoD system, which is its own process, so that a game book can be released simultaneously as a PDF and a PoD.

When that's all squared away, I upload the files to the appropriate servers, and start arranging press releases and advertising. Once I send those press releases off to the venues that report on the industry, and post the same information on the lists and fora I frequent, the product is launched.

Quick rundown (announcing): I'm not a big believer in announcing products to the public too far in advance. Part of this is that the reason it happens is related to the way the distribution system works: you have to have the information on a product out before release so that retailers can order the game from the distributor when the game is finally launched. Since I don't have to worry about that right now, I don't do it.

There another part to it: personal embarrassment when a schedule slips -- or vaporizes. You see, initially, **Dead Inside** was supposed to come out from [Ronin Arts](#). When that wasn't going to happen (for good reasons; Phil and I are still on amicable terms, I think), I decided to do it myself. I've tried to avoid announcements until the product is nearly ready to be sold. Unfortunately, I may have just violated this little rule of mine; odds are good that by the time you read this, you'll know the real title of my **PDQ**-based superhero RPG I've been calling "Sekrit Projekt Ampersand" publicly. I wrote a little bit on it for [Daedalus](#) that spills the name -- **Truth & Justice** -- because I was expecting it to go through playtest more smoothly than it has. Some restructuring has to be done on the game to integrate the core **PDQ** rules; originally, **T&J** was intended to be a for-sale supplement to the free **PDQ** ruleset.

Oh well. Maybe having the name of the game out there will have a positive marketing effect.

Monkey Money

Now the money starts rolling in, right? Sort of.

RPGNow and e23 pay on a monthly schedule; for the first month, a PDF/PoD publisher will see no money from sales. To pay for the flat fee art and advertising (and up until recently, small print runs as noted above), I had to pony up capital; I then paid myself back out of the earnings from the first month's sales. For subsequent print runs, I had to take last month's earnings to pay for this month's printing costs. Luckily, now that the Lulu.com process has started, I can use the funds earmarked for that to pay for other things, like art for new games and advertising for the entire catalog.

I treat money from sales on a product as my *gross earnings*; after all, the vendors take a percentage of the real gross for themselves. From that, I pay back anything owed directly to myself/ASMP for capital outlays on art, launch advertising, or printing. After these expenses are paid, that gives me my *joint net* on the product. The joint net is divided up among the profit participants by percentage, which is generally the writer/publisher (me), the interior artist, and the editor. I call the percentage that goes to me my *personal net*, and more than half of it generally gets reinvested into ASMP one way or another.

However, there are some products in my catalog -- **Monkey, Ninja, Pirate Robot Deluxe** and **Monkey, Ninja, Pirate Robot: the Roleplaying Game** -- where I am both the writer and the artist, and I paid the editor a flat fee. This means that, in theory, all the joint profits would go directly to me as personal profit; in practice, these profits go directly into the ASMP "capital fund" and are available for continuing advertisements, networking costs, office supply expenses, postage, and professional memberships and development. This is one of the big reasons that ASMP has been able to increase its advertising campaigns over time: these two products are dedicated to paying for them.

Quick rundown (dedicated products): The genesis of this idea of creating products solely to underwrite later products was an adaptation inspired by the use in the comic book publishing world of putting out individual issues of a book as loss-leaders to garner interest in an eventual trade paperback collection.

Monkeying with the Numbers

So what does all of that get you in dollars and cents?

Well, ASMP has a catalog of six products, of which two are free. On the four for-sale products, ASMP made rough gross earnings of \$1,814 in 2004. When the capital outlays, launch advertising, and print runs for all products were paid out, this gave a joint net of \$1,150. After payouts to other participants, my personal net ended up being around \$600 for the year.

Quick rundown (personal net): More than half of that \$600 has gone directly back into the "company coffers." So, I essentially made about \$240 this year, or \$20 a month, from ASMP. (Actually less, because I used most of my share of the money to buy out the percentage participants on **Dead Inside** and **Cold, Hard World** after three consecutive months -- the last quarter of 2004 -- of sluggish sales. The upside is that now those products are in a similar class as **MNPR Deluxe** and **MNPR:RPG**, and provide operating funds for more advertising and future products, so long as sales continue.)

Now, let's play a little game. Let's pretend that I got paid by the word for writing these products, we'll only count the three biggest, and we'll just ignore the parenthetically mentioned buyouts. That's a word count of 155,560 for **DI**, **CHW**, and **MNPR:RPG**; grand total earned is \$240. That means my per word rate is around *one and a half-tenths of a cent*. Scary, huh? Let's back out a level, and use the entire joint net for the math; my per word rate changes to a whopping *seven-tenths of a cent*. Let's back out completely to gross earnings; now I am making a princely *one and one-tenth cent per word*, which is nowhere near the common professional rate of 3 cents per.

If I had written that 155,560 words for someone else, it would have ended up being: \$3,111.20 at 2 cents/word, \$4,666.80 at 3 cents/word, or \$6,222.40 at 4 cents/word, which are the rates I've worked at in the past. (This, of course, also ignores the fact that few extant RPG publishers would want to publish a competing rules system or setting unrelated to their products.)

I've never worked for a company for rates lower than 2 cents per, nor higher than 4 cents per (except for SJ Games' **GURPS Steam-Tech** compilation, which was paid for in copies). So far as I can remember, I have not turned down anyone who has specifically asked me to do freelance work in order to do my own games until just this month ("Campaign in a Box" has been on hiatus for unrelated reasons). Nobody's beating a path to my door. But, honestly, neither have I been aggressively pursuing freelance work.

Quick rundown (overall money): Thank God I have a day-job.

Monkey Meanings

If I were relying on ASMP money to live, I'd run things a bit differently. I'd treat ASMP as a fully-fledged second job, rather than the hobby-job I'm currently treating it as. I'd seek loans, investors, and other financing to keep myself afloat. I'd move heaven and earth to get into the distribution channel, because it's really the only game in town.

Even doing all of that, there's a damned good chance I'd lose my shirt in this market. There's substantial competition, from much better capitalized and more established companies, with much more commercially viable product catalogs.

Ultimately, however, I'm not sure I'm in competition with, well, anybody. I don't think I'm taking sales away from any other publisher. I haven't yet published any **d20 System** material, which is the 800-pound gorilla in the market. Only two of my products are available in print (on demand); the others are PDFs. Only one of my products has sold over 200 copies; the rest have sold below 100. As I understand it, that's around 13% of an average print run for most small-press game publishers (for more on this, see below). A distributor probably wouldn't touch such a catalog with such low sales.

Quick rundown (industry print runs): Many of the game books in the RPG industry have print runs of around 1,000 to 2,000 copies. We're talking small-press, here; the big companies like Wizards of the Coast, Steve Jackson Games, and White Wolf all tend to deal in much larger numbers. (I've heard that White Wolf considers a 3,000 unit run the bare minimum for a line's continuing viability.) Indeed, very

few small-press companies do print runs of 5,000 units.

Most game books in the distribution system typically have a 90-day sell-cycle, where the majority of their sales are made; it's uncommon -- maybe even rare -- for a book to completely sell out its initial print run, even within a year.

Let's compare *Dead Inside's* 200-some sales with a breakdown comparing it to different percentages of sales for different sizes of print runs.

Print Run	Quarter Sold	Half Sold	Three-Quarters Sold	All Sold
1,000	250 (DI 80%)	500 (DI 40%)	750 (DI 26%)	1,000 (DI 20%)
2,000	500 (DI 40%)	1000 (DI 20%)	1500 (DI 13%)	2,000 (DI 10%)
3,000	750 (DI 26%)	1500 (DI 13%)	2250 (DI 8.9%)	3,000 (DI 6.7%)
5,000	1250 (DI 16%)	2500 (DI 8%)	3750 (DI 5.3%)	5,000 (DI 4%)

That's not too bad. Especially not for a game as recondite as *Dead Inside*.

On the up-side, ASMP's PDFs and PoDs are always "in print." They are not tied to the typical 90-day sell cycle; indeed, they form a strong backlist that continues to attract sales long past the first three months of release. You could go and buy copies now, *whenever you are reading this article*, whether it be the week of publication or five years from now, provided the wheels don't fall off of RPGNow or e23. And every single sale of a PDF/PoD product has a dramatic impact upon the profits seen by the publisher and participants, in a more direct way than I think most product sales in the distribution system see. After all, they have two to three tiers of structure (retailers, distributors, publishers) to percolate through until they reach the creatives -- if additional moneys reach the creatives at all, which they often do not (flat fee, remember?).

I have no illusions about how my games will sweep over the mid-tier like a fog of death, crushing my enemies, driving them before me, so I can hear the lamentations of their women, thus allowing me to shove my arm down White Wolf's throat like bloody Tyr, after which I can then use my new Lupine Club-Arm to bludgeon Wizards of the Coast/Hasbro into submission. ASMP will then take the throne of Utter Dominance of All Gaming! Bwah-ha-ha-ha!

...

Anyway, not gonna happen.

Indeed, I'm starting to lean towards the idea that I'm not so much a publisher as a gallery or studio artist. I consider ASMP a studio, intended to produce certain pieces of "art" (if this term seems too loaded for RPGs, please replace it with "niche product") that I wish other people to see, increase exposure of all the involved creatives, stake a claim in a newish market niche, pay for its own expenses, and provide a small -- but useful -- influx of cash. Additionally, I'm using ASMP to learn what I can about the ins-and-outs of small business.

I'm generating pieces of art/text for a niche group of customers in a niche segment of a niche industry. Compared to the publishing business, I'm a little kid scrawling on the wall in crayon. I *cannot* honestly be said to be in competition with other RPG publishers, or even the top-end of the RPG PDF publishers. If one insists on doing so, I think it's obvious that I'm "losing."

But I don't see it that way. I'm *winning*. I've gotten products out that I genuinely think are good work, which would probably have never been published by anyone else. The exercise pays for itself, teaches me about an industry I'm fascinated by, and provides me enough money each month over and above to buy a pizza or pay a small household bill. At the end of the day, it's something I'd be doing anyway.

If I focus on the concept that I am contributing (granted, in a small way) rather than competing in the market, I can see my way clear. I'm producing good, offbeat games for people interested in that sort of thing, and 99% of gamers will probably never hear of any of them. But I get to do so without losing my shirt, having the experiment pay for itself, learn a lot about small business operations, and make pocket monkey -- er, money.

This situation is already happening. I'm already basically getting everything out of it that makes it worthwhile to do instead of swimming or reading a book or organizing my comic collection. It's the journey that is important, not the destination. ASMP pays for itself, and doesn't hurt anybody else's business.

Ergo, nothing to do but enjoy the ride.

* * *

Special Thanks to Chris Aylott, Andy Byers, and John Nephew.

Costumed Clichés

Four Fantastic Foregone Conclusions in Supers Universes

by Brian Rogers

When designing a super-hero universe (not merely one in which some people have super-powers) GMs usually hew close to established examples. After all, the genre has been defined over 70+ years, and there are certain things that [players expect](#). However, the GM should be aware of some genre assumptions which can -- and perhaps should -- be broken.

#1: Physical Restrictions (and male pattern baldness) Increase Mental Power

While Professor X is the platonic form of this cliché, it actually stretches back farther, to Dr. Sivana who bedeviled Captain Marvel. The idea plays neatly into a lot of stereotypes about scrawny, brainy nerds and big dumb jocks, and also makes a nice parallel between the physical paragons who defeat schemes facing the minds that conceived them. In the 1960s the simultaneous appearance of Charles Xavier and Niles Calder displayed the cultural meme shift from short to handicapped, which culminated with Jean Grey's change to Phoenix -- death is the ultimate physical restriction, so she got a ton of points for that!

The first step to combating this cliché is being actively aware of it. Your players almost certainly are: over the years through various players I've heard the lines "Well, little Timmy's still on crutches, but man have his math scores gone up" and "Hey, my old PC reappeared in a wheelchair. Since she's a psychic, that rocks!" If your players want to play with these archetypes, let them, but don't populate your world with paraplegic mentalists or midget inventors unless you're deliberately playing to type. Alternately you could make a link between physical and psychic well being, so that your ESPers have reason to develop their physique.

#2: Flight is the Preeminent Super-Power

The majority of super-heroes can fly. Even in stories where the heroes have only one or two powers use any justification for granting flight within that power's aegis (Storm with wind, Polaris with Magnetism, Banshee with his scream . . . flowing around his body to propel him upward?!?) or flight devices are provided to all and sundry (Legion of Superheroes). While this can be convenient, giving everyone high mobility, it debases what should be one of the powers that epitomizes human dreams into something commonplace, barely worth mentioning.

In his director's comments for X2, Bryan Singer comments on how he didn't want *any* of the characters to be able to just fly, since he felt it would damage the setting's "reality." This meant that when people do fly on screen, it a) always has a solid justification and b) reinforces the power of the moment. Be aware that making a similar decision (either by banning flight outright or by instituting a high purchase cost) will increase flight's relative power, it also reduces PC mobility and might anger your players if the only super-humans with flight are the bad guys, who just keep flying away.

#3: Non-American Heroes Have National/Ethnic Powers

Inside the vast metropolises of America, heroes come in all shapes and sizes, with powers and names ranging from the iconic to the absurd. Outside of the United States, however, it's all about the ethnic identity, baby! You're from Ireland? Expect to be named Shamrock . . . if you're lucky! Arabia? Arabian Knight if you're a man, or Scheherezade if you're female (and well-read). In comics this evolution occurred when our isolationist heroes stirred from the States

some decades after WWII, and writers were forced to acknowledge that the rest of the world probably produced some super-humans too. The result is rather silly.

If you avoid falling into this pitfall, it makes national-themed heroes stand out. If the players note that a region has many such supers while others don't makes what was a cliché into a clue. If you decide to include such heroes, you can take the curse off by including them in the States. Kurt Busiak pulled out all the stops doing this in *Astro City*, where those outside of the book's eponymous center have slightly ridiculous regional names: the Brahmin in Boston, the Untouchable in Chicago and the over-the-top Real Thing guarding Atlanta. Or, if you're already populating the world with balding paraplegic midget scientists, you might as well have the Irish hero Blarny Stone (He's incredibly charismatic. and made of stone!) battling the German super Berlin Wall (He's immovable. and made of stone!) with the help of the Palestinian Dome of the Rock (He's a bald genius. who is made of stone!).

#4: Indigenous Supers Have Magical Themes

This is as much a natural extension of the noble, nature-loving savage stereotype as the physically impaired mentalist: balancing a deficiency in one area (in this case, advanced technology) with its perceived opposite (mystical power). And if you do, have a Magic vs. Technology antithesis in your game world that makes sense. If all the other magical characters wield western-style hermetic sorcery, or if you have a non-magical origin for all supers, then even magical hand-waving doesn't solve the problem. Even the otherwise power/nationality shattering X-Men book lost ground to this one, with Storm being a "Goddess" to her fellow Africans, which 30 years later looks more patronizing than multi-cultural.

As with all of these, the knowing is half the battle. Make up your mind whether there is a battle between magic and technology (and if nature magic *does* work, why isn't the world's pre-supers appearance history very different?), and stick to it. You could also hide patterns within patterns -- perhaps the Canadian hero Shaman has magical aptitudes not because of his First Nations heritage, but because he's a doctor, and doctors make the best mages (ala Dr. Strange and Dr. Druid). The other First Nations heroes are mutants, victims of radiation accidents and, of course, Canadian Shield, who carries a magical shield . . . and is made of stone!

George On My Mind

"What saint is St. George that we do here honor him?"

-- Edward VI of England

Although it was petulant Protestantism that impelled Edward's question, it remains a good one. Who is St. George, and why is he beloved by at least two religions from the British Isles to the deserts of Arabia? What keeps him alive when his fellow warrior-saints from Theodore to Demetrius are merely names on a page? How do you stay immortal if all you do is fight dragons and die a martyr? Once more into the breach, then, the gap between legend and history where dragons dwell. Once more, for England and Saint George!

*"For there is none of you so mean and base
That hath not noble luster in your eyes.
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot.
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
Cry 'God for Harry! England! and Saint George!'"*

-- William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, III:i:29-34

By the time Shakespeare wrote those words, St. George had already passed the peak of his popularity in England, a victim of the Protestant Reformation and the dim view it took of saints' cults. Before 1530, St. George's Day (April 23) was celebrated from York to Norwich to Bristol to Canterbury by "ridings," great festive parades featuring canvas dragons and "Georges" clad in damask and gilt. In 1415, the Archbishop of Canterbury raised St. George's Day to the equal of Christmas, and it remained a feast of obligation for English Catholics until 1778. The Plantagenets and Tudors eagerly promoted the cult of St. George as a national, martial symbol contrasting both with France's St. Denis and with England's meeker patron, St. Edward the Confessor. [Richard II](#) made the [red cross on white](#) of St. George the national arms for his invasion of Scotland, and Edward III founded the Order of the Garter with St. George as its patron. The English enthusiasm for St. George goes back to the Crusades, where he (along with Sts. Demetrius and Theodore) [miraculously appeared](#) to the knights at Antioch in 1098 and Jerusalem the next year, and was reinforced by his aid during the Third Crusade and (making the switch from Christian warrior to English knight) against the French at Calais and Agincourt during the Hundred Years' War.

English knights ran into St. George all across the East, from the great church of St. George at Constantinople to the church commemorating his martyrdom at Nicomedia to his tomb at Lydda (modern Lod, near Tel Aviv). Antioch, Tarsus, Edessa, Tyre, and many other sites had churches of St. George reaching back into the latter days of the Roman Empire. England had a church of St. George at Doncaster going back to 1061, but France had one as early as Merovingian times (ca. 512 A.D.), and the churches of St. George in Venice and Rome (where the head of St. George was unveiled by Pope Zacharias in 751 A.D.) may be still earlier. In addition to England, St. George is the patron saint of Aragon, Catalonia, Lithuania, Palestine, Portugal, Moscow, Istanbul, Genoa, and (of course) Georgia. His cult extends throughout the south Slavic territories and into Ethiopia. As the patron saint of cavalymen, farmers, syphilitics, and archers, he obviously gets around.

"This odious stranger, disguising every circumstance of time and place, assumed the mask of a martyr, a saint, and a Christian hero; and the infamous George of Cappadocia has been transformed into the renowned St. George of England, the patron of arms, of chivalry, and of the Garter."

-- Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

If, that is, he ever existed at all. Although the Vatican assures us he was real, in 1969 Pope Paul VI dropped St. George off the universal liturgical calendar, demoting him down to the lowest category of saints, those suitable for mere local commemoration. This is because exactly nothing is known about St. George except that he was a martyr. Traditionally, he is supposed to have been a cavalryman in the Roman army martyred in 303 A.D. during the persecution of Diocletian, but the martyrology of Eusebius in 313 A.D. doesn't name him, mentioning only a nameless soldier martyred at Nicomedia. Pope Gelasius (or someone signing his name) refers to George in 495 A.D. (or later) as a saint

whose name is "justly revered among men, but whose actions are only known to God." The earliest *Acta* date from either the late fifth or early sixth centuries, and tell the story of George suffering a series of ever-more lurid deaths (seven, in the usual version) at the hands of "Emperor Dadianus," (who conveniently never existed either) only to be resurrected each time ready for more torture.

Some authorities, most notably Gibbon, identify "St. George" as one George of Cappadocia, a bishop of Alexandria and sometime pork contractor to the Roman Army, who was definitely for sure martyred under the Emperor Julian in 361 A.D. Since this George was an unsavory character at best, not to mention an Arian heretic, orthodox (and Orthodox) scholarship rejects this identification, pointing to a church in Syria dedicated to George that can be dated to 368 A.D., too soon after Alexandrian George's lifetime for his Arian heresy to be forgotten. However, recent studies have questioned that date, moving it up to 549 A.D., well past the sell-by date for telling one's Georges apart in the confusion of Persian invasions and whatnot. (One version of George's *Acta* identifies "Dadianus" as the King of Persia, for extra murk.) It is interesting, however, that the early *Acta* identify one "Athanasius" (Arianism's most hated foe) as the court magician of Dadianus, and that one of Alexandrian George's partners in heretical pilfering was none other than the master of the mint, one Dracontius.

"Thus as they spake together the dragon appeared and came running to them, and St. George was upon his horse, and drew out his sword and garnished him with the sign of the cross, and rode hardily against the dragon which came towards him, and smote him with his spear and hurt him sore and threw him to the ground."

-- Jacobus de Voraigne, *The Golden Legend*

Because the legends of St. George are remarkably dragon-free for the first several centuries, regardless of which George spawned them. Although various icons in Georgia and Ethiopia (which might, actually, be St. Michael) can be adduced to the contrary, St. George is not unequivocally mentioned as a dragon-slayer until the mid-13th century, in Voraigne's *Golden Legend*. Here, the story springs full-blown of St. George riding by a town, meeting a princess, rescuing her from the dragon, beheading the dragon in the town square, and converting everybody in eyeshot to Christianity. The location of this miraculous combat is variously given as Silene in Libya, Joppa in Palestine, or Beirut in Lebanon (where St. George's Bay remains to this day). This story is, without a doubt, a simple remake of the Greek myth of Perseus and Andromeda. Perseus is even supposed to have killed his sea monster on the rocks at Joppa, just down the road from St. George's tomb. How, exactly, the dragon got involved with George in the first place remains unclear: St. Theodore (George's co-sub-patron in Venice) killed a crocodile, Constantine the Great liked to be depicted slaying the "serpent" of evil on temples (including Christian ones), and the *Acta* several times refers to Dadianus, metaphorically, as a "dragon" implying his kinship with Satan, the Dragon from the Pit. Really, given the number of dragons and serpents around, it's a good thing St. George showed up when he did.

*"Green George we bring,
Green George we accompany,
May he feed our herds well.
If not, to the water with him."*

-- Carinthian fertility song for St. George's Day

In some versions, St. George rescues the town from thirst also, since the dragon is guarding (or polluting) the local well. This "knight in the [Waste Land](#)" imagery can run as far as we'll let it in one direction, but in the other, it points to George's other main role, that of fertility spirit. The delightful J.G. Frazer tells us that in olden times "Green George" was played by a young man, parading in green branches and leaves on April 23, throughout Romania, Carinthia, [Transylvania](#), Belorussia, and Ukraine. In Roman times, this fertility parade (on April 21) was called the Parilia, dedicated to Pales, the god of shepherds, interestingly also an aspect of Mars the warrior. The Parilia is also a milking festival; St. George's [severed head](#) "gave forth milk and water," in the words of the *Acta*. The first Parilia was supposedly when Romulus plowed a furrow around the Palatine Hill, and what do you suppose *giorgios* means in Greek? "Plowman," or farmer. At the end of the parade, depending on the locality, Green George (or a green [effigy](#)) is thrown into the river. (In the *Acta*, St. George is thrown down a well.) Frazer manfully resists pointing up the obvious, but we all know that human sacrifice (and hence, in a way, martyrdom) is a kissing cousin to effigy-throwing by now, don't we? This Green Man version of George ties in oddly with some of St. George's martyrdoms -- especially being dismembered and scattered in the fields -- and with the similar death of [Dionysos](#). (The feast of Vinalia Priora, the

First Wine, was held on April 23. Hmmm.) And Dionysos, as [we've learned](#), was the inspiration (and secret patron?) for the Mummers' Plays, which featured guess which saint?

"Some have identified Khezr with St. George -- but he might more accurately be seen as both St. George and the dragon in one figure. . . . The 'spirits' of Nature, such as Khezr and the djinn -- who are in sense the principles of natural power -- recognize in the Muhammadan Light that green portion of the spectrum upon which they themselves are also situated."

-- Peter Lamborn Wilson, "Sacred Drift"

As we follow George into the wild wild East, we meet his Muslim counterpart [Khidr](#) (or Khezr, or Khizir, etc.) coming and going. Christians in the Levant used to report Muslims donating money to churches of St. George to repay vows sworn to Khidr. Like George, Khidr is associated with water, in this case the water of Eternal Life. (Just the kind of thing you'd need for repeated resurrections. George, it may interest you to know, is always depicted as beardless and youthful -- even childlike -- in traditional iconography.) Khidr is venerated by the Sufis, with their [sevenfold](#) initiatory stages -- which match George's seven martyrdoms too well for words. Khidr and George are both Green Men, although as Peter Lamborn Wilson points out, Khidr isn't really an [emerald](#) warrior, and especially not a dragon-slaying one. However, Khidr and Osiris share the color green, the power of initiation, and the water of eternal life -- and George and Osiris share the being torn apart and resurrected bit, as well as the contest with a snake (Typhonian Set, or Apep). A serpentine trail of identity flashes through these figures, Egyptian and Christian and Muslim alike, something older than all of them. Something that can die seven times without dying.

"From this tabular view of the legends it is, I think impossible not to see that S. George, in his mythical character, is a Semitic god Christianized. In order to undergo the process of conversion, a few little arrangements were rendered necessary, to divest the story of its sensuous character, and purify it. Astarte or Aphrodite had to be got out of the way somehow."

-- Sabine Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*

One begins to suspect St. George of pulling a ringer on us. Not just with his Arian namesake in Alexandria (although a Muslim St. George would closely resemble an Arian one, exalting the Father at the expense of the Son), but throughout his legend cycle. Like the Seven Chinese Brothers who continuously escaped execution with specialized supernatural powers, St. George slips out of bronze ovens, wheels of spears, and sealed wells. In the *Acta* he calls Apollo a demon, and forces him to fly out of a statue -- but in the *Golden Legend* and its variants he is Apollo, killing the poisonous Python to recover the Well of Knowledge and Life. A 10th-century Arab commentator, ibn-Wahshiya, identifies the ceremonies at Tammuz' death (which he had read about in ancient Nabatean records in the Mesopotamian swamps) as identical with the "legend of St. George that is current among the Christians." (Suddenly, St. George is revealed as Adonis, the lover of [Cybele](#) the castrating devourer, and his beardlessness becomes far creepier.) Tammuz, the dying god, whose wife then descends through seven layers of Hell (seven deaths) to recover the [Water of Life](#) for him. St. George is Tammuz and Dionysos, Khidr and Romulus, Marduk and Perseus, Osiris and Horus, Apollo and Mars. Maybe "George" is one of the [flock entities](#) we have encountered before, battling snakes with Mopsus or serpents with the [Roc](#). Or perhaps the dragon St. George defeats is the Worm Ouroboros, the wheel of time that ground down forgotten gods and heroes. St. George rides out of Mesopotamian prehistory, stealing the name of an unworthy martyr and the iconography of an angel, detached from time, wearing the Rosy Cross and appearing to the soldiers of a demi-paradise when their need is greatest, living forever, forever young.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Pyramid Review

The Mystic World (for Champions)

Published by [Hero Games](#)

Written by Dean Shomshak

Cover by Jonathon Davenport

Illustrated by Nate Barnes, Warren Beckford, Jefferson Cram, Robert Cram, Keith Curtis, Newt Ewell, Jeff Herbert, Jason Ingel, Nick Ingeneri, Eric Radamaker, & Barry Winston

160-page b&w softcover; \$26.99

The Mystic World is a supplement that explores the magical aspect of the [Champions](#) universe. It describes and examines the cosmology of this setting as well as its characters, villains, and powers, all with a view to providing the GM with the foundation for both an arcane-themed campaign and adventures plus events designed for the mage or magic-using character in the superhero group. Like many other *Champions* supplements, *The Mystic World* does not stand alone -- more so than most supplements. It does not detail how to create a mystic character; *The Ultimate Mystic* will do that. It does not provide a plethora of arcane villains; both *Conquerors, Killers, and Crooks* and *Arcane Adventures* (a companion volume to this one) will do that. And [Champions Universe](#) gives more and relevant specifics facts about that setting, such as other characters and organizations.

So having got what it does not deal with out of the way, what can be found in *The Mystic World*? Divided into four chapters, it opens with "Worlds of Worlds," a look at how the *Champions* multiverse is ordered, described in Kabbalistic terms, from the material world of Assiah where Earth's own dimension is located, up through the Astral World or Yetzirah which is of particular importance, as it contains the destinations of choice for most mystics, reached via astral space. Besides giving access to the inner planes, it is also home to places created by the imagination and dreams. For example, Windyburg is a ghost city grown from the memories and stories of the "Age of Gangsters," while it is also possible to visit the school where you are naked. Also covered in detail are the mechanics of astral travel.

Both the many heavens of Elysium and hells of the Netherworld are also covered, but predictably none of these are all that interesting, although "Rock Candy Mountain," the heaven envisaged by hobos possesses a certain charm. This is made up for by the sections on "Faerie: The Land of Legends" and "Babylon: The City of Man." In the former can be found all of the nature spirits and pagan deities, such as Greco-Roman, Celtic, and Norse, as well as Faerie itself. Also found here is an Amerindian version of Faerie, which has since been invaded with the myth of the Wild West! Should a GM want to send the heroes back to the age of Cowboys and Indians without all that mucking about with time travel, then "The Even Wilder West" is perfect. Adventures in the age of dragons and hoards could also be conducted in this realm. "Babylon: City of Man" is a conglomeration of cities from the present, the past, and the imagination. Thus the fogbound streets of Victorian London lead to the covered markets of Baghdad and the gleaming towers of Manhattan, while the Emerald City of Oz glows in the distance. Babylon is a place to run the ultimate in urban adventure, the heroes aided by allies such as Sherlock Holmes and Bugs Bunny, while stalked by the *mythic* and very deadly version of Jack the Ripper.

The second chapter continues the overview-type material, looking at the shadow world where mystic people and places

can be found. This starts out on Earth and works its way outward, discussing how to become a super mage, the factions the dynasties and cults fighting for dominance on Earth, and the all-important position of Archmage. This is the office held by the Earth's most powerful mystic, and passed from one super mage to the next. At the current time, nobody holds the position, although in the official **Champions Universe** time line, the hero Witchcraft will ascend to it in the year 2020. Other candidates are also considered, and there is no reason that obtaining the position should be out of reach to a player character, though it should be a long-term objective; if such a hero is not destined to become the Archmage, then striving for it is at least interesting and game worthy.

In more generic terms, the place of some mystical creatures is considered, including "genius loci" (elementals, spirits and demons), ghosts, vampires, and therianthropes or shape changers. The place of gods is also discussed, most notably that while they still exist -- and are very powerful -- all suffer a supernatural "ban" that prevents them actually physical visiting Earth. That said, they can make their presence known through the use of avatars, offspring, nexus points, and gates, as well as via massive application of magic. Mystic places are given a similarly generic treatment are , but this is supported by a number of examples that work not just as locations to slip into a campaign but also as samples for the GM to base his own on.

Much of **The Mystic World** is statistics or mechanics free. All this changes with "The Book of Wisdom," essentially the **Champions Universe** grimoire. The primary difference between the super heroic mage and the "average" heroic mage is the number of limitations that the latter applies in mechanical terms. Thus he might need semantic, material, and verbal components, and more, to cast his spells, whereas the super heroic mage can get away with just waving a wand. In mechanical terms, as super heroic magic becomes more powerful, the limitations are excised, with the active points of these spells adjusted to fit the campaign level. This kind of magic in the **Champions Universe** is known as Thaumaturgy, under which the mystic commonly places his spells into power frameworks. These are essentially package deals that let a character possess a variety of spells and effects at a reduced cost.

The Mystic World details over twenty such power frameworks under various categories, from attack and defence to sensory, movement, and miscellaneous. For truly powerful games, especially potent spells and magical artefacts are given. Particularly notable of these are the "Quaternion Banishment," a spell that can defend a whole dimension against an invader. Unfortunately, it comes at a price, as it draws its power direct from human life!

This section ends with the mechanics for the guidelines given in the first section for astral and extra dimensional travel and the senses related to both. Certainly the most common of these is Astral Awareness, which can be brought for a simple cost. But in true **Champions** style, the other powers come with no little detailing. One fringe benefit that might prove entertaining is that of Deity, which gives a character a group of worshippers. He does not become an actual god though, he just has to live up to his godhood!

Finally, the last chapter describes and stats up three Mystic Master Villains. All are exceedingly evil, all want to conquer the Earth, and all are inhuman in their motives. Skarn, shaper of worlds has conquered hundreds of dimensions and sentient species. Tyrannon the Conqueror is also known as the Cosmic Cancer, in that he not only captures whole dimensions and merges them into his home dimension of Thulkos, he is also aided in this by hundreds of duplicates. The Dragon, opposed in secret by the Nagas, lies closer to home, being the Earth's ultimate source and power of evil. He has appeared in many mythologies in numerous dragon related forms, but has for millennia been bound on the Astral Plane. Instead he works through the weak, the corruptible, and various cults. The inference is that he is the ultimate hand or claw behind V.I.P.E.R., which in some ways makes the Dragon *the* perfect villain for a very long-term campaign.

The Mystic World is neither an exciting nor spectacular supplement, nor is it meant to be; while it is an interesting read, it is only interesting to a degree. This is very much due to the nature of the book. It is an overview and meant to go only so far before other supplements take over and provide greater depths. Yet what **The Mystic World** does detail makes it certainly useful -- the villains, the various dimensions, and the guidelines on astral and dimensional travel. In these and more, **The Mystic World** does what it is supposed to do, provide an overview of the magical aspects of the **Champions Universe**.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Modern Magic (for *d20 Modern*)

Published by [The Game Mechanics](#) & [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Eric Cagle, Mike Montesa, Rich Redman, Mat Smith, & Stan!

Edited by JD Wiker

Art & Layout By Marc Schmalz, Clarence Harrison, Pete Schlough, Jacob Elijah Walker, & Cheyenne Wright

80-page b&w softcover; \$17.95

Too many products from Wizards of the Coast forego any kind of setting information in favor of a straightforward listing of the rules and stats necessary for their games. They could take a few pointers from The Game Mechanics playbook. Partnered with Green Ronin Publishing, they have released **Modern Magic**, a collection of material designed to put the magic in your *d20 Modern* game.

There's not much about the actual layout that's different or surprising: It's just magic, after all. There's a spell list, some new character classes, some gear. But it's in the conception and the execution that the book really distinguishes itself from its source.

Each and every element of this book is pregnant with possibilities for a modern campaign. Taking a contemporary setting and laying this veneer over it, the writers manage to make magic seem like an organic part of whatever setting to which it's applied. Spells can mimic guns and cell phones, if the mage also apes the action with his hands and fingers. Screensavers become tools of hypnotism, vehicles drive on their own, and bullets can be fired into a crowd without hurting anyone but the intended target. Everything here feels so right, so intuitive. Names are reflections not only of the spell but of the culture of which they're a part, like Be the Ball. Even the material components pull their weight, such as the paintball that allows you to quick-change your car's paint job.

The gear section has a similar theme, and is just as much fun to read. The light bulb of true seeing shows things as they really are within the glow it casts, the bags of holding have become backpacks and pockets, and police whistles call up phantom cops who obey their "superior officer." There are a few new special abilities, too, so weapons can go Hollywood and not run out of ammo.

As you might expect, all these cool toys have a use...to the military. The mixing of the armed forces and magical might is all-too-brief but oh-so-cool. There are suggestions on how to use magic on the battlefield (and why mages won't keep combat from being interesting for the grunts); what level of magic may enter your game (so you can surreptitiously add a few magic users or just hand out spells like C-rats), and who's who in the military chain of magical command. Spell books are now issued by Uncle Sam, and some particularly potent enchantments are top secret.

Another nod to weaving your realism and your fantasy: voodoo. Being "ridden" by the spirits you summon sounds like a lot of fun, and the penalties one might pay for blowing one's ceremonies may have far-reaching consequences. Ritual magic gets the business, too, but it's not like the spells you're used to. They use certain incantations and "seeds" that may allow combinations and new magical effects, and the book lets you mix both forms of magic into the setting for a whole lot of color and depth. Some new character classes for the different forms, on the battlefield and off, let you get

use out of those rules. And for the normals? Even mundane charms and the like can afford some measure of protection in an overly mystical world.

The artwork is mostly a winner as well. Some of it, like Walker's contributions, tend to the slapdash side, but it's all clear, matches the text, and so much of it is outright beautiful for simple penciling.

Unlike too many other books of this type, ***Modern Magic*** gives truly practical material on crimes and adventures. How can spells help commit crimes? How can they solve them, and how can they be kept from short-circuiting a good adventure with a few well-placed waves of a wand? Do you want them using magic in the courtroom? About the only true downside is that the book has appeared in another form, specifically as PDF files, so you may already have some of it. Although the sections were developed separately, they meld together almost seamlessly. The chapter on voodoo goes into a good bit of description on that practice, and it may feel a little too deep in places, but a) it is a modern form of magic, and b) it's necessary to give a lot of that context to get the right mileage out of the system.

There have been many genre mixtures since the opening of the ***d20 Modern*** license, but few of them enjoyed as much spirited, focused, and just darned useful material as ***Modern Magic***.

--Andy Vetromile

Tax Code of Honor

For those of you not in the States, April 15th marks Tax Day, which is the day when our federal and state income taxes are due. This is only slightly less pleasant than Tacks Day, which when all Americans are required to swallow a handful of rusty tacks -- a national holiday instituted to commemorate the Grover Cleveland administration.

My taxes were unusually complicated this year, and even the easy-to-use software to guide you through the process -- software, I add, that makes the process several orders of magnitude easier than going it alone -- *still* requires a level of literary analysis that has me staring at the same sequence of six words for 10 minutes.

This is also the first year I've actually owed money to the federal government, as well as the first year I've needed to pay state income tax, so the whole process has weighed on my mind. "Gee, let me spend 14 hours pouring over papers, sorting receipts like a mole-man, fighting with software, and giving money to the government. Someone pinch me; I'm living a dream."

(As an aside, my friend Robert used to make out his checks to the "*Infernal* Revenue Service," which is an adventure possibility right there.)

Anyway, my attitude and likely column about taxes took a decidedly different turn today when I listened to National Public Radio's ["Talk of the Nation."](#) where they interviewed the director of the Electronic Tax Administration and a former IRS commissioner. One of them (I don't remember who) made the point that the IRS is in charge of administration, collection, and enforcement of taxes; they have nothing to do with designing or structuring the tax code.

Oh, sure, I *knew* this on some level; the years I spent sleeping through high school civics classes absorbed on a subconscious level. But hearing someone who works at a high level of the IRS complain about how complicated the tax code is, and sound almost apologetic about it . . . well, it put things in perspective.

And it got me to thinking: What if upholding the rules you've agreed to is a burden? And what are the gaming potentials of this?

I'm certain this is obvious to many of our readers have had this epiphany before, but it's new to me. The default I've always assumed for almost any character who needs to uphold a code of conduct or honor -- especially PCs -- is that they *like* doing it, or at least derive some moral or spiritual satisfaction by doing so. But what if that isn't the case? What if someone upholds a set of rules, for no reason because they *have* to?

This immediately opened up all kinds of roleplaying possibilities. Imagine a Jedi character in a *Star Wars* game who upholds the Jedi code of honor just because he knows he has to. "<sigh> I guess I'll help the innocent in this situation. It's my job and all." While the seduction of the Dark Side would be an obvious plot thread for such a character, it's not required; he may recognize the danger of the dark path and avoid it, and *still* not be particularly "good" (at least how such things are judged).

All kinds of interesting character possibilities opened up with this idea:

A Super with flashy or explosive powers who enjoys using them, and thus becomes a hero (upholding the hero's code of honor) just so he has an excuse to use his powers. ("Ya-hoo! I got to destroy that abandoned warehouse with my enerblasts! Oh, and . . . um, we, y'know, stopped the bad guy.")

A cleric who fully follows the tenets of his faith despite having serious doubts and reservations, just because he *has* to (to maintain his position, retain his powers, or the like). A code akin to the Ten Commandments becomes a lot easier to follow when the almighty will visibly and directly punish you for not doing so . . . regardless of your true feelings. (Or, to take it further, the monks from *Canticle for Leibowitz* adhered to a strict code of conduct they didn't even understand, let alone or agree with.)

A galactic police officer who upholds the code of the law, simply because he's good at it and he needs a job.

An ***In Nomine*** angel -- especially an Elohite -- who maintains the moral code ascribed by his master without having any particular attraction or inclination toward "good."

An android with free will who falls back on default programming, despite being perfectly capable of forging its own destiny.

Back in my college days, I vividly remember an article in the college newspaper during Stop Rape Week. In it, a fraternity member was quoted as saying, "We do not condone rape; we condemn it. It is definitely illegal." That quote angered me then, and it angers me now; as horrible a crime as rape is, I hated the notion that some people might refrain from doing so solely because of its illegality. But I realize this is the case; sometimes people uphold moral codes, laws, or rule systems simply because they have to.

For example, it would be wrong to use this column as a flimsy justification to write off my tax expenses as a business expense. And I swear, on my honor, never to get caught doing this.

--*Steven Marsh*

Object Lessons (Part II)

An Enchanted Collection for *Call of Cthulhu* d20

by Nicholas Luna

*Editor's Note: The first part of this article of assorted items and artifacts for **Call of Cthulhu** d20 appeared [last week](#). Read it or be devoured.*

Japanese Puzzle Box

Public Information

This puzzle box has a bloody and violent history that dates to World War II. An American soldier, John Smith, acquired the box during the U.S. occupation of Japan. Smith died violently in 1954, but the investigation that followed produced no answers. Smith's family placed the box on auction, and oil magnate Ralph Carter purchased it. Carter died in a fire in 1957. However, the box survived and a collector of puzzle boxes, Robert Masterson, purchased it. In 1958, Masterson was murdered, and the box ended up in the possession of Alan Smithers. In 1993, authorities arrested Smithers for the murders of three young women, and a jury convicted him.

This is a typical puzzle box -- a cube that is six inches on a side (five Sun). The box is made of a combination of woods, and inlaid with intricate designs of gold, silver, and green jade. Engraved on all sides of the box are tiny "mystical" characters.

GM Information

The box contains the spirit of Toyoyomi Tsunenaga, an elderly Japanese cobbler. Tsunenaga died in the nuclear assault on Hiroshima. At the instant of his death, a mystic in a small village was finishing the mystical rituals that would allow the box to act as a storage device for disembodied entities. Somehow, the box trapped Tsunenaga's spirit. The pain of his death drove Tsunenaga insane. He swore vengeance on all Americans. Whenever the box is opened, Tsunenaga is freed for a short time, and during this time, he unleashes his vengeance on those around him.

Determining how to open the box requires an Intelligence check against DC 30. If opened, the box releases an insane, evil spirit. The spirit will use his powers to either kill and/or torment the opener, and others when possible. The spirit automatically returns to the box after 30 days. If "killed," the spirit returns to the box automatically. The box appears to be indestructible.

To create the spirit, apply a ghost template to a Defense Option character with skills related to cobbling and home life, and the following ability scores: Str 10, Dex 11, Con -, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 17. He should have the Sensitive feat. Select a level of experience appropriate to the PC group.
Weight: 2 lbs.; Study Time: 2d4 days (DC 30).

Adventure Ideas

- A PC's friend dies, and the police rule it an accident. This doesn't seem right to the PC, who decides to investigate it on his own. During the course of his investigation, he comes across the box. If he interacts with the box, he may learn the cause of his friend's death, but he will have new problems.

A rash of unusual deaths has occurred, mostly among wealthy and influential people. All are ruled accidental or natural, but one or more PCs (perhaps a Sensitive), senses something unusual, and decides, or is prompted, to look into things. A humiliated fortuneteller, who has found a way to control Tsunenaga, is ordering the deaths.

Kabuto and Mempo

Public Information

In the early Tokugawa period (1603-1867), a *ronin* ("man of the waves," a Samurai with no lord) wandered the land. His name was Tanaka Hideyoshi, and he believed the gods had given him a mission: he hunted and killed missionaries. Hideyoshi became well -- known to missionaries and native alike. They called him "*Akuma*" (devil). He earned this moniker both as a result of his deeds, and the distinctive *kabuto* (helmet) and *mempo* (mask) he wore. According to legend, Hideyoshi died in a battle against a band of missionaries. Legend tells that the missionaries used dark magic to bring Hideyoshi down, but before he fell, he killed 13 of the missionaries (some versions of the tale indicate that he killed five of the missionaries in one stroke).

The Westerner who killed Hideyoshi was familiar with the customs of the land and he went to great effort to return Hideyoshi's head, armor, and weapons to the Tanaka family. The ronin's weapons and armor stayed with his family until World War II. When Allied forces occupied Japan in the 1940s, someone, whose name has never been revealed, donned Hideyoshi's armor and hunted American soldiers. This killing spree did not last for long before an American G.I., Remo Tanner, killed the would-be ronin. Tanner kept the kabuto and mempo, and smuggled them to America when his tour was up.

Renowned smith Kotetsu Yorimoto forged the helmet and the mask at the request of Hideyoshi, and intentionally designed the pieces to resemble something the Westerners would fear.

The kabuto is made from banded iron strips. It is lacquered a dark red color, with two large black horns on the front. The mempo is the same color, shadowed with black, and styled to resemble a devil or demon. Together, the set resembles stereotypical images of the Christian Devil.

GM Information

Although the kabuto and mempo represented some of Yorimoto's finest work, they did not gain true power until donned by Hideyoshi. His belief was so intense that it imbued the set with real power. When Hideyoshi donned the set, they became a part of him. The death dealt by Hideyoshi in his quest took a severe toll, physically, spiritually, and mentally. By the time he confronted his last victims, his ongoing battle had left him exhausted. Contrary to the legends, the Westerner who killed Hideyoshi did not use black magic, or any other kind of magic. Hideyoshi's exhaustion caused him to make a tactical error that allowed the Westerner a killing blow.

When worn together, the kabuto and mempo provide a +1 armor bonus to Armor Class (treat this as if derived from a shield, allowing it to stack normally with other armor bonuses). Also, whenever the character suffers a critical hit, there is a 10% chance that the bonus damage is negated, turning the hit into a normal strike. While worn, this set provides some power against those who believe in the Christian God. The character wearing the set can attempt to inspire fear in Christians. The victims must be within 10 feet, and must roll a Will save against DC 12 or be stunned for one round. Regardless of whether or not the save is successful, the victim cannot be affected by this power again for 24 hours.

Christian priests and missionaries are particularly vulnerable to the set. If a character aggressively confronts a Christian priest or missionary while wearing the set, the victim must roll a Sanity check (0/1d2) and a Will save against DC 16. If the saving throw fails, the victim is stunned for 1d3 rounds and suffers a -1 morale penalty to all rolls during the confrontation with the armor -- wearing character.

When the set is worn by someone who believes, with his very existence, in the threat of Christianity, such as Hideyoshi, the set almost comes to life when worn. The mask moves as if it is the character's natural face. His voice

booms and reverberates, and he emits a sulfurous odor. This increases the Sanity loss for priests and missionaries to 1/1d4, the Will save DC increases to 20, and the stun lasts for 1d6 rounds. When the set is active in this fashion, it is very taxing to the character who wears it; he loses one point of Sanity for every 30 seconds that the set is active. Weight: 6 lbs.; Study Time: 1d4 weeks

Adventure Idea

Priests are being killed across the city. According to the few eye -- witness reports, the killer looks like a demon. If the characters are investigators, they could be hired or recruited to find the killer. Perhaps one of the victims was a friend, relative, or colleague of one of the PCs. If one of the characters is a priest, perhaps the killer is going to come after him.

Kane March Motorcycle Helmet

Public Information

Perhaps no villain in movie history has inspired more terror than Kane March, from the *Dead Man Killing* series. Kane, a demonic psychopath, claimed his first victim in 1981, and since then, he has scored a body count of 539, with the record of 138 kills alone in part five, *Kane Goes to Kansas*. There are rumors that the upcoming part 12, *Kane versus Mason -- the Last Slash* will top this count. This helmet is the same one worn by Kane in the first nine installments of the series. James Stickler, the man behind the face shield, originated the idea of the killer wearing a helmet, designed it, and wore it in parts one through nine. Before putting the helmet up for auction, he autographed it.

This is a scuffed, glossy black motorcycle helmet with a black-tinted face shield. There is an axe blade-size "rip" in the rear of the helmet. The right side has James Stickler's autograph in silver ink.

GM Information

James Stickler is a decent man who believes strongly in his craft. He worked very hard to bring the role of Kane March to life. To prepare for the part, he studied every serial killer he could. He visited prisons, read books, and talked to murderers. He consulted with religious figures on demonic possession. He spent most of his free time envisioning himself as Kane. He even went so far as to stalk young people while wearing the helmet. As he made more *Dead Man Killing* movies, he continued with his unusual study methods. During the ninth movie, he began to have unusual dreams and sensations centered on stalking and killing. Troubled, he sought professional help. His psychologist suggested he cease his unusual learning methods. James agreed. In addition to ending his unusual research, Stickler sold the helmet and quit playing the part of Kane; unfortunately, by that point, the intense negative energy of his habits had infused the helmet with a power all its own.

When a character dons this helmet, he must roll a Will save against DC 15. If this fails, he immediately adopts the persona of the infamous killer Kane March. Kane is a merciless, brutal murderer, who prefers to kill teenagers and young adults engaged in intimate relations. Once he focuses on a victim, he continues until the victim is dead, or he is stopped. While under the effects of the helmet, the character gains the following:

- +8 Strength
- +4 Constitution -- This provides him with + 2 hit points per level.
- +10 bonus to Move Silently
- +4 bonus to Hide
- Damage Reduction 10/+1
- Fast healing 5
- Low-light vision
- Immunity to death from massive damage
- He functions normally even after he reaches negative 10 hit points

The effect of the helmet lasts until the character dies, or the helmet is removed, something he cannot do voluntarily. If he survives, he suffers 1d8 Sanity from being under the effects of the helmet.

Weight: 1 lb.; Study Time: 1d4 days.

Adventure Ideas

- A serial killer is loose in the city. According to reports, he wears a black motorcycle helmet, uses unusual and particularly violent methods, and is unstoppable. The PCs end up investigating and learn about the helmet. Perhaps they visit Stickler (living on small ranch) to see what he knows. The killer is physically tough, so they may have to resort to clever planning to deal with him.
- Similar to the idea above, but if the GM is particularly cruel, he might make the person in the helmet a child or young teen. Not only do the PCs have to deal with a nearly unstoppable killer, they have to take into account that he is an innocent.

Oak Inkwell Set

Public Information

This inkwell set originally belonged to one Benson Howell, a London antique dealer. Howell was murdered in 1889. During the course of the investigation, authorities learned that he engaged in criminal activities, specifically forgery; specifically a forger, and provided many forged documents for criminal enterprises, specializing in inventory logs and documents of transferal. Three weeks after the murder, authorities apprehended Terrance Stone, and found the inkwell set in his possession, along with other stolen goods. Stone, in his confession, claimed that Howell tried to increase the fee for an arrangement they had entered. Stone, enraged, killed Howell, and took the set. Shortly after Stone's conviction, barrister Evan Blair acquired the set.

This oak desk set measures 14 inches by 14 inches by 14 inches. The finish is reddish-brown, dark and unmarred. The inkwells sit in silver -- plated slots the upper corners. Along the lower end is a recessed area for resting pens. In the bottom, there is a pullout drawer for storing paper. The set includes two square crystal inkwells, each measuring three inches in height.

GM Information

Benson Howell was an antique dealer, a criminal forger, and a sorcerer. He used his mystical skills to create this set, increasing his ability to forge documents. Creating the set took three years, but it was very successful. Terrance Stone ordered a forged shipping invoice from Howell, but when Howell finished the document, Stone tried to avoid paying for it. There was a brief struggle, during which Stone stabbed Howell. With his last breath, Howell cursed Stone with bad luck, and this curse eventually led the authorities to Stone.

This item can be used to create forged documents. This requires that the ink in the crystal wells be mixed with the blood of the forger. Roughly 1-2 hit points worth of blood must be mixed with the ink, and this blood must be freshened with every new document.

The character must write the forged document with the blooded ink, and then place the finished document in the paper drawer, along with a drop of blood from the person whose handwriting is to be forged. Twelve hours later, the document will appear to be written in the intended handwriting. Checks to detect forgeries created by the inkwell set suffer a -12 penalty.

Note that the crystal wells included with the set are the only ones that will work with the set.

Weight: 5 lb.; Study Time: 3d8 days.

Adventure Idea

A PC receives a package from an out -- of -- town acquaintance or friend. Inside the package is this set and a hastily scrawled note. It is short, cryptic, and indicates the PC should guard the set carefully. Attempts to contact the friend are fruitless. The friend has been killed (or kidnapped if you prefer) by his local crime syndicate. The syndicate learned of the set and wants it for their own use.

Pilot Whistle

Public Information

For years, people have been performing salvage operations near the coast of Florida, attempting to find gold and artifacts left on sunken ships. Calvin Boater recovered this whistle from the wreck of the Spanish ship Luz del Dios, near the coast of Florida in 1982. Boater sold the whistle in 1985 to cover his salvage costs. Desmond Levin, a collector of marine antiquities, purchased the whistle. A sudden hurricane destroyed Levin's boat and killed him two years after he purchased the artifact. The whistle washed up on the beach, where a beach visitor picked it up and later pawned it.

This is a heavy gold whistle, four inches in length and typical of the whistles used by pilots in the 1600s. There is evidence of an engraving on the right side, but the actual details have long eroded away.

GM Information

The whistle belonged to Carlos Franco, captain of the Luz del Dios. Franco, in a rage, beat one of his sailors for a minor infraction. The sailor, who possessed some mystical knowledge, devised a plan to gain vengeance on the captain. Every night for several nights, he stole the captain's whistle, and, with the aid of a summoned deep one, performed a ritual on it, cursing it. Shortly after the process was finished, the captain used the whistle at midday, near the coast of Florida. The resulting hurricane destroyed the ship.

The whistle has two different powers, both usable only in coastal waters. When blown forcefully at midday, it immediately summons a fierce hurricane that lasts for 1d10 hours. When blown at midnight, it summons to the blower 2d6 deep ones who will attack him, unless he can convince them to do otherwise.

Weight: 1/4 .lb; Study Time: 3d4 days.

Adventure Ideas

- The PCs are invited by a secret enemy to come on a late night cruise. The enemy possesses both the whistle and a means of making a deal with deep ones. His plan is to use the whistle at midnight, and direct the deep ones to kill the PCs. Perhaps the PCs will learn of his plan before hand, and will be able to avoid battle with the deep ones.
- The PCs learn about a cultist plot to summon deep ones to take humans as breeding stock. The cultists are going to use the whistle to summon the deep ones. Perhaps someone important to the PCs has been kidnapped to be given to the deep ones.

Prehistoric Cube

Public Information

Discovered in an Austrian coal bed in 1885 and estimated to be prehistoric, this cube created a small sensation upon its discovery: scientific journals printed articles, and educated people in scientific circles discussed it. Eventually, the cube ended up in a Salzburg museum. In 1888, an American journalist traveled to Salzburg in order to investigate the cube, and was told that the cube and its information file had been lost. The journalist proclaimed the cube a hoax, and it passed out of fancy.

The Prehistoric cube is actually more of a rectangle, measuring 2.5 inches long, 1.8 inches wide and 1.8 inches tall. It weighs 1.75 pounds, and has a shallow incision that goes completely around the long axis. It appears to be composed primarily of iron, with carbon, and a small amount of nickel.

GM Information

The Serpent People originally created the cubes as devices to expand the mind, and open new vistas of reality. Through the ages, the Serpent People have forgotten how to create the cubes, but they know the purpose of the devices and will go to any lengths to recover any that are found. This cube is one of a handful that remains.

To open this cube, the character must maneuver the halves (marked by the incision) in small, precise increments. This requires an Intelligence check against DC 25. When opened, the cube releases a small cloud of spores. A knowledgeable user will inhale these spores. If the cube is opened accidentally, or unknowingly, the character must roll a Fortitude save against DC 18 or instinctively take a deep breath, inhaling the spores.

A Serpent Person who inhales the spores gains +2 Intelligence and +2 Wisdom. If a human inhales the spores, the effects are random. Roll d% and compare to the following:

01- 10	Increase Intelligence and Wisdom by +2 each. The character suffers from inhuman thoughts and dreams, losing 2d4 Sanity. Cthulhu Mythos: +2 ranks.
11- 20	Increase Intelligence by +2. The character suffers from inhuman thoughts and dreams, losing 1d4 Sanity. Cthulhu Mythos: +1 rank.
21- 30	Increase Wisdom by +2. The character suffers from inhuman thoughts and dreams, losing 1d4 Sanity. Cthulhu Mythos: +1 rank.
31- 50	Lose 2 points of Strength.
51- 70	Lose 2 points of Constitution.
71- 95	Lose 4 points each from Strength and Constitution.
96- 99	The spores alter the character's brain functions, granting him the Sensitive feat, even if he does not meet the ability score requirement (if he already possesses this feat, re-roll, subtracting 20 from the roll).
00	The character is slowly transformed into a Serpent Person.

The spores can affect any given creature only once, regardless of how many cubes he is exposed to, and all ability score changes are permanent. All changes take 1d4 weeks to finalize (play the changes up gradually).

Weight: 1.75 lbs.; Study Time: 3d6 days.

Adventure Idea

A PC, or an acquaintance, finds the cube after an encounter with Serpent People or with cultists of Yig. A clan of Serpent People learns that he posses the cube, and attempts to retrieve it. They may use different tactics, including money, trickery, or violence. Perhaps two clans of Serpent People discover that the character has the cube, and he becomes caught in a tug-of-war between the two.

Prester John's Letter

Public Information

In 1165, Manuel I Comnenus, the Byzantine emperor, Frederick I Barbarossa, the Holy Roman emperor, and several

other European leaders received letters from the legendary Christian king, Prester John, who claimed dominion over a vast territory, containing at least 70 kingdoms. He claimed guardianship over the shrine of St. Thomas, and described the riches and wonders of his kingdom. He claimed that he would bring his armies to battle the enemies of the cross of Christ, and regain the Holy Sepulcher. This never occurred, although some scholars claim that other historical figures did attempt the task.

Today, few believe that Prester John actually existed, but the letters "he" sent are real. This one dates from the 12th Century, and appears to be the letter sent to Frederick I.

Prester John's letter consists of five vellum pages, slightly stained from age and handling. The contents are written in a bold, slightly faded script.

GM Information

The letter contains a mystical code that allows individuals to find John's kingdom. Many of those who sought the kingdom passed right through it without ever realizing it. John's kingdom exists in Asia, but it is slightly out of phase with the real world, or "between the lines." It can be entered only at a certain location in India.

The letter is written in Latin (DC 15) and contains a code of sorts, embedded in the text. If studied intently, roll an Intelligence check against DC 30. If successful, the character is able to see "between the lines," and learn the true path to the kingdom of Prester John. Once he initially deciphers the letter, he must re-read it every day and succeed in an Intelligence check against DC 20 to continue following the trail. If he fails the roll, he may attempt to decipher it again that day, but each failure that day costs him 1d4 Sanity as his mind opens in alien ways. Each time he deciphers the letter, he retains the knowledge it provides for six hours. Weight: Negligible; Study Time: 3d4 weeks (DC 30).

Adventure Ideas

- The PCs are hired on behalf of an unknown benefactor to find the kingdom of Prester John. Unknown to them, if they succeed, their benefactor has plans to strip the kingdom of all riches and power using a private army.
- While in India, one of the PCs begins to have visions of people and of buildings, medieval in appearance, in his peripheral vision. He, and others, may believe that he is becoming delusional, but in fact, he is slowly seeing through the veil that separates the kingdom of Prester John from the real world. Research turns up the letter, which may be used to enter the kingdom and cure the character's visions.

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Humans In Fish Suits?

Cetaceans In *GURPS Blue Planet*

by C.J. Beiting

GURPS Blue Planet does an admirable job of converting the complex *Blue Planet* universe to *GURPS*, but since its publication there have been several other ocean-based game supplements released that can enhance a *GURPS Blue Planet* game. The most notable of these is *Ancient Echoes*, the *Blue Planet* cetacean sourcebook, which presents much more detail about cetaceans and introduces three new cetacean races. Since cetaceans are so different from humans, this article will present a number of suggestions for roleplaying them, in the light of *Ancient Echoes*. While this information is largely specific to the *Blue Planet* universe, players of *GURPS Uplift* or *Under Pressure* may find some things that will be helpful.

Note that, like *GURPS Blue Planet* itself, an article like this can only scratch the surface of a complicated subject. In particular, it is meant to provide rules without too much background. The reader who desires more detail is urged to get a copy of *Ancient Echoes* for more information.

Roleplaying Cetaceans

Cetaceans are more than merely "humans in fish suits." While *GURPS Blue Planet* does a good job of presenting the difference between human and cetacean on p. BP11-12, some critical differences should be stressed:

Mind

Although they can think, uplifted cetaceans do not think like humans. They are still on some level predators, and are often more emotional and extreme in their reactions than humans are, as well as quicker to violence. However, they also calm down much sooner than humans do, too, and forgive and forget much more quickly.

Cetaceans are adapted to the three-dimensional world, and think in 3-D terms in a way that humans still do not, even after several centuries of flight; this makes cetaceans tactically deadly in underwater combat. The need for a cetacean to be able to sleep, yet rise to the surface to breathe, has resulted in a brain where each hemisphere can operate independently. Thus, cetaceans can compartmentalize their minds, and many can literally do two things at once. Cetaceans are much more aware of their surroundings than humans, and are difficult to surprise. Finally, cetaceans possess a holistic view of the universe, which does not draw sharp distinctions between things. This can be very helpful (a cetacean can often make intuitive leaps of insight that baffle humans), or very dangerous (a cetacean will often perceive an attack on one of his tools as an attack on him personally). Even settled cetaceans are still in some sense nomads, and do not like to own more things than they can comfortably move; few own more than a CICACA powersled and a hoverdrone sensor remote. Most also utterly reject cyberware, and find biomods only slightly less unpalatable. Cetaceans are thus not materialistic, and do not understand the human desire to acquire property and objects.

Senses

Cetaceans use different senses than do humans. Sight is not as important to them, and they are blue-green colorblind anyway. They have no sense of smell, and a feeble sense of taste. What matters to a cetacean is sound, and game masters should stress this. Even the darkest waters are alive with sounds that give a cetacean his picture of the universe. Furthermore, cetaceans have a special sense that humans do not: echolocation. Even in the darkest waters, cetaceans can "hear/see," although this vision can be blocked by other loud sounds, clouds of bubbles, and so on. Cetaceans can see thorough solid objects, if those objects are soft enough (e.g., any cetacean can spot the metal of a

gun hidden beneath clothes, or the presence of a baby in a pregnant woman, etc.). Echolocation can even sometimes give a cetacean clues as to the emotional state of its target.

Social Groups

Humans are social from choice; cetaceans must be social for their mental health. The basic cetacean social unit is the pod of from two to 50 individuals, averaging 10 or less (just the right size for a group of roleplayers!). A pod is often as important to cetacean as a family is to a human. Cetaceans can form and dissolve pods for a variety of reasons -- families, workgroups, criminal gangs -- but when formed, a pod is very important to a cetacean's psyche. A lone cetacean is either a misfit or an outlaw.

Cetacean religion is also very different from that of humans. The "Church of Whalesong Theogony" does not revere a particular divinity, nor does it set moral codes or standards for its members. The "Whalesong" is the cetacean racial epic, and "worship" services consist in reciting it and adding to it. The Church has officers, not clergy, and is not sophisticated enough in its beliefs to have a true theology. In some areas, the Church functions more as a cetacean social hall and mutual-assistance society than anything a human might recognize as a religion.

Some of these ideas can be modeled in **GURPS** using the following traits:

Advantages

Ally Group (Pod)

see p. B232

Virtually all cetaceans will have some version of this advantage, varying only by the size of the pod and how frequently the cetacean interacts with them. Note that there are significant disadvantages that go along with this, see below.

Clerical Investment/Religious Rank

see p. CI22

Clerical Investment in the Church of Whalesong Theogony is actually closer to the Religious Rank advantage in practice. Offices in the Church are ranked according to the following scheme:

- *Rank 3*: Church Leader ("silent/provider")
- *Rank 2*: Recorder ("choose/remember"), Counselor
- *Rank 1*: Songmaster ("vision/singer")

Catsleep (new)

5 points

You can fall asleep easily when you want to, but your brain sleeps one hemisphere at a time or otherwise maintains a degree of alertness. You can make sense rolls to detect dangers other sleepers would miss (though at -2 compared with being awake), and don't suffer mental stun upon awakening. You can even choose one continuous activity that requires no significant power or concentration while sleeping, as when seals and dolphins surface periodically to breathe.

Catsleep combines some features of both Deep Sleeper and Light Sleeper; you may be jarred out off sleep more than usual, but without as much overreaction as Light Sleeper.

Combat Reflexes

see p. B20

Although few cetaceans are soldiers, they are all predators. Their quick responses and inability to be surprised can be well simulated by the Combat Reflexes advantage. Many cetaceans who do not have this advantage on their racial template often possess this advantage, even if they have never seen combat.

Compartmentalized Mind

see p. CI52

Because of the independent nature of the hemispheres of the cetacean brain, many cetaceans have one level of the Compartmentalized Mind advantage, worth 50 points. These cetaceans can quite literally do two things at once, such as composing poetry while attending a business meeting. Note that these can be two mental things only: a cetacean can only do one physical thing at once, or one thing involving echolocation at once.

Eidetic Memory

see p. THS215

An odd feature of the cetacean mind is that it has an extended short-term memory. Most cetaceans can remember events that happened to them within the past 60 hours with photographic clarity. After 60 hours, the memories are "archived," and are as reliable or unreliable as those of a human. Such limited Eidetic Memory costs 15 points, and provides no skill bonuses.

Empathy

see p. B20

The use of cetacean echolocation can reveal much about its target's emotional state. Cetaceans can often have the Empathy advantage with regard to other cetaceans, and with the GM's permission can also have it with humans.

Intuition

see p. B20

The holistic nature of the cetacean mind allows them to make leaps of logic that baffle humans, but that are frequently right. Intuition is a very common cetacean advantage even for the cetaceans whose template does not include it.

Neural Jack

see p. BP20

Although cetaceans loathe implants as a rule, one of the few they will tolerate is an interface jack. Cetaceans who prefer precision operation of machinery will have a neural jack rather than using sonic trodes. Note that after Recontact, the Hydrospace corporation initiated a special good-will program in 2176 that gave free neural jacks to any native-born cetacean who requested them. Cetacean characters on Poseidon of an appropriate age can be assumed to have a neural jack regardless of wealth level or situation.

Disadvantages

Attractiveness (varies)

see p. B29

Cetaceans do not go in for jewelry as do humans, but they are fond of a ritual scarring that leaves raised marks on their bodies (usually on their dorsal fins) that can be perceived by echolocation. These scars can reflect pod membership, Incorporate citizenship, military unit allegiance, and so on. Some cetaceans also add scars to make them look "tough"; extreme cases of this can result in decreased levels of Appearance. Garish, tasteless body paint is a new fad in some cetacean circles; Attractiveness modifiers for it are up to the GM.

Bad Temper

see p. B31

Although cetaceans don't necessarily have terrible tempers, they are usually more emotional than humans, and sometimes react to events in ways humans would consider extreme. This can be simulated in many cases by the Bad Temper disadvantage. On the plus side, the extreme emotional reaction rarely lasts long, and is usually forgotten and forgiven quickly. By cetaceans, anyway; humans are another matter.

Compulsive Behavior

see p. B32, U21

Dolphins (both commons and bottlenoses) love humor and practical jokes in a way that can range from the Playful (-1) quirk all the way through Compulsive Play (-5/-10) disadvantage. Also, since Cetacean lends itself well to puns, some have the Punning skill (p. CI130), and a few take the habit all the way to Odious Personal Habit levels. Most dolphins will look with favor on anyone who can make good puns. Belugas and pilots share these traits to much lesser degrees, and while orcas don't actually have No Sense of Humor, it seems like it sometimesâ€

Duty (Involuntary)

see p. B228

It costs roughly \$15,000 to ship a bottlenose or common dolphin to Poseidon, or \$20,000 to ship an orca, pilot whale, or beluga. Cetaceans that cannot afford this price often indenture themselves to a company or Incorporate to afford passage. Many newcomer cetaceans on Poseidon have an involuntary Duty to represent their indenture. Since it is easy for a cetacean to "swim away" from their indenture, indenture-holders have increasingly resorted to some very severe measures to enforce this Duty.

Duty (Podmates)

see p. B39

Any pod expects certain duties from its members. Sometimes, these duties can be unexpected, inconvenient, annoying, or dangerous. This can come as a bit of a surprise to the rare humans that have been invited to join cetacean pods.

Greed

see p. B33

This disadvantage is extraordinarily rare amongst cetaceans. Most cetaceans consider it a form of mental illness.

Impulsiveness

see p. B33

The flip side of cetacean Intuition is Impulsiveness. Cetaceans often make up their minds instantly, without much conscious thought, and then rush out to *do* something. Often that something is inappropriate, wrong, or dangerous.

Obsession (Racial Survival)

see p. CI93

Many cetaceans have a fear that they will become join the great whales of earth in extinction, and have a corresponding Obsession with racial survival worth 5 points. Such a fear is irrational by the 22nd century, but nonetheless very real to many cetaceans. Many cetacean behaviors -- dolphin hypersexuality, cetacean longevity treatments, and the large number of cetacean-based charities (such as sponsoring migration of poor cetaceans to Poseidon) -- frequently can stem from this fear.

Odious Racial Habit (Kill offspring)

see p. B26

While cetaceans seem more enlightened than humans, they do preserve one practice humans consider barbaric: They examine all newborns for fitness, and drown the ones who do not measure up. Cetaceans insist that this practice, which long predates genlift, is an essential part of their culture, and have formally enshrined it in the law of the Cetacean Cultural State. While some humans accept this, others do not, and any new mother cetacean who loses her calf for any reason may have problems with some human neighbors. This reputation is worth 5 points.

Sense of Duty (other Cetaceans)

see p. B39

Many cetaceans have this disadvantage, which is worth 110 points. This represents the deeply-held cetacean belief in reciprocal altruism. The expectation of reciprocal altruism from humans who have no idea or intention of displaying it in turn is a perennial source of human-cetacean friction.

Sense of Duty (Podmates)

see p. B29

While most pods exact legitimate Duties from their members, most members feel the need for duty as well. Duty (Podmates) and Sense of Duty (Podmates) very often go hand in hand with many cetaceans.

Social Stigma (Outlaw/Outsider)

see p. B27

Since cetaceans are so intensely social, one the greatest punishments meted out to an errant podmember is ostracism. Any cetacean who chooses to be alone voluntarily is a misfit. Thus, any lone cetacean will automatically be presumed to be an Outlaw by other cetaceans unless he has Contacts to vouch for him. Otherwise, there is a 15 point disadvantage.

Skills

Economics (Dolphinonomics)

see p. B60

Cetacean economists point to the success of the Hydrosan corporation, and maintain that the differences in the cetacean psyche have resulted in a working alternative to traditional human economic theories. Human academics are still unconvinced. Gamemasters who believe the claims can make "Dolphinonomics" a specialization of the Economics skill in *GURPS Blue Planet*.

Languages

see p. B54

There are three languages of importance to cetaceans:

Cetacean (M/A): The default language for cetaceans. All cetaceans except belugas know it automatically. It is a dense language based on a heavy compositing of concepts and images. As such it is very good for poetry, and can convey information in about at tenth of the time as any human language, but it can be somewhat imprecise and confusing with regard to exact meaning. Cetacean also lends itself to racial and geographic accents more readily than human languages do, making it easier to identify a speaker.

It is impossible for humans to learn Cetacean naturally, as many of its sounds are beyond the human threshold of

hearing.

Interspec (M/E): Interspecies Language, or "Interspec," is a modified gesture-and-sound language invented so that humans and cetaceans can communicate with each other. All cetaceans know it, and it is the second most common language on Poseidon (after English). Virtually all Natives on Poseidon know it, though few Newcomers do.

Note that Interspec is an artificial gesture-based pidgin language, and should be (M/E) rather than (M/A), as detailed on p. BP22.

Beluga (M/A): Because they were genlifted in isolation, belugas have their own language which is distinct from Cetacean. They are quite pleased by this achievement, and maintain their linguistic skills proudly. Nevertheless, most belugas also have to learn Cetacean to communicate with their peers.

Finally, there are special notes with regard to human languages. First, although cetaceans cannot actually speak human languages, since they lack vocal cords, they can understand human languages just fine. Many cetaceans who do not wish to be bothered with translation software become fluent in a human language or two. Conversations are a little one-sided, though: the human speaks to the cetacean in his native language, and the cetacean responds in Interspec.

Note also that although cetaceans are officially Mute, many can use their sonar and blowholes to mimic a number of human sounds. For a cetacean, this is much like a human learning ventriloquism, though slightly easier. Thus, even without a translator, a skilled cetacean can manage to mimic about a hundred human words, although with a pronounced accent. The cost of being able to do this can be assumed to fall under the mitigated version of Mute in the existing cetacean templates.

Medical Skills

see p. B57

In the Blue Planet universe, medical skills should be specialized by general species. Thus there is a Physician (Human) and Physician (Cetacean) skill, and so on. Medical treatment of cetaceans is difficult, and drugs and medical procedures are roughly three times the cost of similar treatments for humans. On the plus side, cetacean echolocation can act as a cheap, portable alternative to x-rays for some injuries, and there are a number of cetacean EMT's on Poseidon.

Religious Skills

Certain skills are appropriate for members of the Church of Whalesong Theogony.

Bard

see p. B47

Here is a case where the worst-named skill in the **GURPS** system is entirely appropriate as (mis)named. Any leader, or prominent worshipper, in the Church will have this skill.

Bardic Lore

see p. CI147

Any leader or prominent worshipper in the Church will also have this skill, representing the corpus of the Whalesong that they have memorized. This is an important skill, as the Whalesong is an evolving creation under continual update and addition.

Rituals and Ceremonies

see p. CI147

Although cetaceans are fully sapient, their worship patterns are decidedly primitive. It is much more appropriate to give a cetacean religions leader this skill, rather than Performance/Ritual. Furthermore, Cetaceans do not subject the Whalesong to the degree of scrutiny that humans apply to their own religions; thus, the Theology skill is inappropriate. Rituals and Ceremonies should replace Performance/Ritual on the Whalesong Mystic template on p. BP28.

Singing

see p. B57

Ordinary members of the Church contribute to worship services through song, and are generally much more skilled at this art than human laypeople are in their own religious services.

Sports (Hydroshot)

see p. B49

As one might expect, Cetaceans are naturally good at Poseidon's official sport, and have their own league. However, given the usually cooperative nature of the Cetacean psyche, the competition between the Cetacean teams just isn't as fierce as that among the human teams, and as a result Cetacean Hydroshot is usually looked on as something merely for connoisseurs (or other Cetaceans).

Features, Quirks, And Taboo Traits

Absolute Direction

Cetaceans possess a very limited version of this advantage, worth 0 points. They can roughly orient themselves to magnetic north, but little more.

Doesn't Dream

Because of the partial nature of cetacean sleep, cetaceans do not dream. At all. In fact, they find the idea of dreaming bizarre and disturbing, and do not like to hear humans talk about it. The "Lucid Dreaming" skill should be removed from the Whalesong Mystic template (p. BP28). "Doesn't Dream" is a 0-point Feature for any cetacean template.

Poor Color Vision

While cetaceans are not completely color blind, they cannot see colors at the blue-green end of the spectrum. If they must color anything themselves (chiefly their remotes), it is usually in bright, clashing color schemes that humans find garish and tasteless.

New Cetacean Racial Templates

GURPS Transhuman Space: Under Pressure proposes a basic cetacean template. What follows is a customized version of that template with some special additions and errata appropriate for the Blue Planet universe:

Blue Planet Cetacean Template

72 points

Racial Advantages: 3D Spatial Sense [10]; Acute Hearing +4 [8]; Alertness +4 [20]; Animal Empathy [5]; Blunt Teeth [0]; Catsleep [5]; Eidetic Memory [15]; Enhanced Move 1 (Swimming) [10]; Extra Hit Points +2 [10]; Independently Focusable Eyes [15]; Injury Tolerance (No Neck) [5]; Nictating Membrane 1 [10]; Oxygen Storage 2 [14]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Pressure Support 1 [10]; Sonar Vision (nearsighted, -25%; underwater only, -30%) [12]; Striker (Ram) [5]; Temperature Tolerance 1 [1]; Ultrasonic Speech [25].

Racial Disadvantages: Aquatic [-40]; Chummy [-5]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support 1 [-10]; No Manipulators (Mitigated for CICADAS, -60%) [-20]; No Sense of Smell [-2]; Poor Sense of Taste [-1]; Short Lifespan 2 [-20]; Social Stigma (Second-class citizen) [-5].

Quirks, Features, and Taboo Traits: Absolute Direction [0]; Doesn't Dream [0]; Poor Color Vision [0].

Ancient Echoes also adds templates for three new cetacean races who were not part of the original settlement of Poseidon, but who have increasingly begun migrating there since Recontact.

Pilot Whales

228 points

Genlifted pilot whales average 15' long and weigh 1370 lbs. They eat 100 lbs./day, mostly fish.

To the basic cetacean template add: +30 ST (No natural manipulators, -40%) [105]; +2 DX [20]; -3 IQ [-20]; +5 HT [60]; Strong Will +2 [8]; Broad Minded [-1]; Dull [-1]; Humble [1]; Pacifism (Self Defense Only) [-15]; Staid [-1]; Raise Oxygen Storage to 3 [2]; raise Extra Hit Points to +4 [10]; raise Increased Life Support to 2 [-10]; add the Feature Nocturnal (when possible) [0].

Pilot whales were uplifted at the same time as orcas and dolphins, but their numbers were so small that none were not allowed to migrate to Poseidon. They are only slightly smaller than orcas, and are unusual in that they were originally nocturnal. Pilots keep diurnal hours at present, but if left to their own prefer to switch back to a nocturnal existence. They are also unusually pacifistic for predators, and are the most peaceable of genlifted cetaceans.

Unfortunately, pilots are the least intelligent of genlifted cetaceans. They also tend to give up quickly when forced to solve problems beyond their abilities. Although they are predators, they refuse to attack other sapient beings in any measure other than self-defense, and are unusually pacifistic in their interpersonal relationships as well. Their lower intelligence combined with their lack of aggression means that pilots are natural followers; they work exceedingly well in groups, and make excellent corporate employees, military support staff, technicians, liaisons, and so on. Pilots are often the glue that holds a group together, and the quiet peacemakers that defuse dangerous situations.

Note that the cleverer pilots are quite adept at using the "big, dumb follower" stereotype to their advantage.

Common Dolphins

138 points

Common dolphins (or "commons") average 8' long and weigh 270 lbs. They eat 20 lbs./day, mostly fish.

To the basic template add: +5 ST (No natural manipulators, -40%) [36]; +3 DX [30]; -2 IQ [-15]; +1 HT [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Intuition [15]; Unattractive [-5]; Dreamer [-1]; Lecherousness [-15]; Responsive [-1]; reduce Oxygen Storage to 1 [-2] and Short Lifespan to 1 [-10]; remove Increased Life Support [10] and Extra Hit Points +2 [-10]; add Quirk: Sexually attracted to humans as well as dolphins [-1] and the skills Acrobatics (P/H) DX [4]; Meteorology (M/A) IQ [2]; and Navigation (M/H) IQ [4].

Common dolphins were the last cetacean species to be genlifted, during, but largely after the Blight, and developed in the shadow of their more developed and popular bottlenose cousins. Commons are smaller, with sharper "noses," but are otherwise much like bottlenoses in shape and demeanor. They tend to be more social and less serious than bottlenoses; they are the natural jokers of the cetacean world. Their natural insouciance covers very sharp intellects and keen perceptions, however, a fact which other cetaceans and humans often overlook.

Commons excel at professions where their gregariousness and innovation come to the fore. They make poor leaders and managers, but good pioneers, spies, scouts, researchers, and prospectors. Some have, unfortunately, become involved in crime.

Genlifted belugas average 15' long and weigh 2750 lbs. In cold climates they eat 50 lbs./ day, mostly squid, but in warm climates they only need to eat 30 lbs./day.

To the basic template, add +15 ST (No natural manipulators, -40%) [90]; +3 DX [30]; -1 IQ [-10]; +2 HT [20]; Double Jointed [5]; Intuition [15]; Mimicry [15]; Dreamer [-1]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Overweight [-5]; Responsive [-1]; raise Extra Hit Points to +3 [5]; reduce Short Lifespan to 1 [10]; remove Enhanced Move [10]; add Features No dorsal fin [0] and Molt [0]; add +1 bonus to Artistic skills [6].

Belugas are amongst the most unusual of the cetacean genlifts. They are descended from arctic whales and have physical features that reflect such a background (copious subdermal blubber, no dorsal fin, white coloring, etc.). Their temperature tolerance range runs from 28° to 70°. Genlifted belugas still prefer colder waters, and those living in equatorial waters must go on a diet to lose the blubber that can cause them to overheat in warm water (i.e., buy off Overweight, and add one more level of Temperature Tolerance for 4 points). Evolution in a cold climate has made even genlifted belugas restless; the need to move in order to stay warm and to hunt is reflected in their racial Impulsiveness. While not as acrobatic as the other cetaceans, belugas are extraordinarily flexible. Finally, belugas are unusual in that they molt annually, shedding their rotten, discolored, smelly hide to reveal fresh white skin beneath. While this is listed as a Feature on the template, during molting season it can be an Odious Racial Habit (-5) to humans and even other cetaceans.

Belugan particularism is cultural as well as physical. Belugas were uplifted secretly during the early years of the Blight, and developed in isolation for a quarter century. Thus, they have their own language and traditions separate from those of other cetaceans. Belugas are natural communicators, and are perceived by other cetaceans as having what a human would term an "artsy" temperament: creative, introspective, erudite, and a bit unstable. Belugas excel at professions which require communication: teaching, leadership, reporting, writing, researching, and singing. They are also good at investigative careers, like research and prospecting. Some have become quite effective con-artists.

Sea Lions

-17 points

Genlifted sea lions average 7' long and 550 lbs. in weight for males, 6' long and 160 lbs. for females. Their bodies lack manipulatory organs, but despite long contact with human civilization they are not quite sophisticated enough to use CICADA units.

Attribute Modifiers: ST +3 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [18]; DX +2 [20]; IQ -3 [-20]; HT +4 [45].

Advantages: 3D Spatial Sense [10]; Acute Hearing +1 [2]; Acute Taste and Smell +3 [6]; Alertness +1 [5]; Amphibious [10]; Catsleep [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Early Maturation [5]; Enhanced Move (Swimming) [10]; Faz Sense (Underwater only, -30%) [7]; Fur [4]; Oxygen Storage [14]; Pressure Support [5]; Sharp Teeth [5].

Disadvantages: Chummy [-5]; Color Blindness [-10]; Distractible [-1]; Dull [-1]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Increased Life Support [-10]; Innumerate [-5]; Mute [-25]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Poverty (Dead Broke) [-25]; Reduced Move (Running) 3 [-15]; Short Arms [-10]; Short Lifespan 2 [-20]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10].

Skill: Survival (Open Ocean, specialized) IQ/IQ+6 [4].

[Genlifted sea lions were present in the first edition of Blue Planet, though were not repeated in the second edition. Officially, they are not canon, but are presented here as an optional NPC race.]

Sea lions have proven to be the most successful non-Cetacean genlift. "Successful" is, however, a relative term: sea lions are not fully sapient, and have a very basic intelligence that allows them to understand about 350 to 400 words in

Interpsec. They also have limited attention spans, and as such cannot engage in complex tasks. They are mostly used as underwater guides, security patrols, and aquatic farm hands. They do have one small advantage over cetaceans in that they are as comfortable out of the water as in it.

Fifty enhanced sea lions were sent on the original Athena Project, and their descendants have thrived on Poseidon ever since. Although their numbers remain small compared to cetaceans, they are a valued part of Native society, filling a role somewhat like the one that dogs do on Earth. The cetacean Hydroshot league has a couple of sea lion teams, which are even less professional in their conduct and gameplay than cetaceans are.

* * *

Special thanks to: William Stoddard, Jon Ziegler, Jeff Barber, Ken Peters, and Sean "Kromm" Punch for help. The "Catsleep" advantage is from [GURPS Gulliver](#) and appears by kind permission of TBone.



The Dermochelys

by Daniel Bronson

Stats are presented for **GURPS Fourth Edition**.

Additional stats for **Fudge** are presented in **bold italic blue** and qualities for **PDQ** are in **green**. **Fudge** is available for free or purchase online from [Grey Ghost Games](#) and **PDQ** is available free from [e23](#).

Kansas jogged up the spiral staircase to the Promenade Deck, dodging a few inebriated partygoers who had yet to make their way to bed. He didn't like skipping his traditional early morning run but a little time in the gym had been an acceptable substitute. It wasn't like anyone else had been using it at 4:30 am. At least not in a manner for which it had been intended.

He reached the Promenade Deck and nodded to the security guard near the outside door.

"Mornin', Jim," he said.

"Good morning, sir."

"All quiet?"

"Yessir. One of the ambassador's bodyguards got a bit rough with Michaels around three but we took care of it."

"Which one was it?"

Jim twitched a smirk, "The one you said to watch, as usual."

"Meh. There's still plenty that sneak by. 'Specially with a crowd like this."

"We're keeping our eyes peeled, sir."

"I know you are, Jim, I know you are. She outside?"

"Yessir."

"Kay. Keep up the good work."

"Will do, sir."

A cool ocean breeze greeted Kansas as he stepped out onto the promenade. The sun, barely peeking up over the horizon, revealed an impeccably dressed older woman at the railing.

"Mornin', ma'am," he said with a smile and a touch of his cap.

Agatha Kirko turned toward her security specialist and eyed his well-worn exercise outfit with mock horror. "Kansas, Kansas, Kansas . . . Do you realize you are quite likely the only individual I know who looks comfortable speaking to me clad in that?"

"Ah, well, not all of us have your fashion sense, ma'am."

*"Indeed." Her gaze slipped back out to the water. "So tell me, what **do** you have?"*

"Thus far very little of note. Your guests seem largely well behaved, with the exception of a minor altercation early this morning. I'll have the full run-down after my briefing at oh-six-hundred. The crew, though . . ."

"Concerns?"

"With a couple. Hard to say why, but I've got people watching them just in case."

"I'll have HR fax us their files."

"Thanks, but I already put in request last night. Should have them when the office opens."

"Good. Anything else?"

"Not really, except I did manage to surprise your nephew and Lady Anatolia in the gym this morning."

"Oh, for the love of . . . I swear, that boy could find a -"

"Shh." Kansas stared out into the sky, squinting. For a second he could have sworn he heard . . . There it was. He yanked open the door to the hallway.

"Jim! We've got a chopper on the starboard side coming in from the sun."

The guard spoke quickly into his radio. A pause. "No answer from the bridge, sir."

And then, from the Sun Deck, came the sound of gunfire.

Welcome Aboard . . .

With so many companies in the cruise industry going bankrupt at the turn of the millennium, it was no surprise that multi-millionaire Agatha Kirko was able to "cheaply" acquire the vessel she had always wanted. The Dermochelys is 217 feet long, 39 feet wide, and was originally designed to sail with 132 passengers. Never one to accept something as is, Kirko had the ship heavily modified. In addition to many other changes it now sports

Agatha Kirko

ST: 8 (*Mediocre*)

DX: 7 (*Poor*)

IQ: 14 (*Great*)

HT: 7 (*Poor*)

Speed: 3.75; **Move:** 3

Dodge: 6

Description:

Early 60s; 4'10", 98 lbs; bright orange hair (dyed) in

new meeting rooms, a ballroom, and a four-room, two-story suite for Kirko herself. It still has space, however, for 116 passengers and 34 crew/staff.

The Dermochelys itself is in prime condition, wearing a decorative theme of beautiful wood finishes, ornate marble, and polished brass. From the suites to the dining room to the ballroom, this ship was remodeled to cater to individuals who appreciate the finer things in life. This includes making certain they are safe at sea. Consequently, several advanced systems -- for navigation, control, and other needs -- were installed. Kirko's vessel boasts impressive technology not only on its bridge but in the engine room as well. A pair of powerful diesel propulsion engines provides the ship with a maximum speed of 10 knots and a cruising speed of 8 knots, and the ship's maneuverability is increased thanks to a bowthruster.

The purpose of the Dermochelys is not solely to act as one of Kirko's multiple homes. Rather than have it sit idle, Kirko continues to run it as a cruise ship most of the time. Approximately 30 weeks out of the year it is available to any interested tourists. The itineraries vary but generally involve the east coasts of the United States, Canada, and Mexico, as well as the Caribbean. Each trip lasts seven to twelve days and begins in the U.S. Another 15 weeks or so are used up by group cruises, where the only passengers onboard are those from a company or some other large organization. It is also available for private individuals if they have the money for it. The remainder of the time Kirko either uses the Dermochelys as her personal get-away or donates the use of the ship to various charities and organizations to be used for fund-raising parties and short tours.

With respect to gaming, the Dermochelys works well as a setting on multiple levels. First, as a cruise ship it can legitimately remove a group of characters from easily accessed reinforcements. Through judicious use of jamming equipment, sabotage, or good old-fashioned battle damage, the GM can at least temporarily cut the cruising PCs off from the rest of the world. Second, it can serve as a way to get from one adventure location to the next, with as much -- or as little -- excitement as the GM wishes. Third, Madam Kirko's high-profile parties offer an excellent scenario for individuals to meet each other for the first time. Social characters could be present as guests, entertainers, or service staff. More physical types would be needed for security, be it general security for the party or specific bodyguards brought by attendees. The particularly exotic -- such as known super heroes -- might be called in as guests of honor. As for those who take pride in their stealth, they can arrive for their own reasons. Surely there will be enough expensive targets for any thief worth his salt, as well as plenty of plots afoot that might benefit from

a bun; walks slowly & with a cane.

Advantages:

Business Acumen (4 levels)
Independent Income (5 levels)
Multimillionaire 3
Status (5 levels)

Disadvantages:

Chronic Pain (9; Severe, 2 hrs)
Skinny
Terminally Ill (<1 year to live)

Skills:

Accounting -- 16
(Superb)
Administration -- 17
(Superb)
Current Affairs/TL8
(Business, High Culture, People) -- 14 **(Great)**
Diplomacy -- 14 **(Great)**
Economics -- 16 **(Superb)**
Finance -- 16 **(Superb)**
Gambling -- 17 **(Superb)**
Languages:
-- English, Greek, & French (Native)
-- German, Spanish, & Italian (Accented)
Market Analysis -- 16
(Superb)
Mathematics/TL8
(Statistics) -- 12 **(Good)**
Merchant -- 17 **(Superb)**
Propaganda/TL8 -- 17

the presence of an uninvited visitor. Anyone with special talents who has worked for Madam Kirko in the past could also be involved, either as a guest or "undercover" in a crew or staff position.

Dramatis Personae

Agatha Kirko, Owner

"I don't mean to interrupt, but my time is worth a great deal of money. I trust you will soon be making a very lucrative point?"

Agatha Kirko, a.k.a. Madam Kirko, is a woman of grand gestures. Between the respectable family fortune she started with and the hundreds of millions she has added to it using her stunning intellect and extraordinary business acumen, Kirko has the resources to be incredibly generous to those who exceed her high expectations . . . and brutally ruthless to those who fail.

People who make it their business to watch Madam Kirko, and there are several who do, have noticed that she has rather uncharacteristically been granting second chances over the past months. Most of these have been provided to relatives that disappointed her previously, leaving experts to suspect some serious intra-family politics have been in the works. The truth is that Madam Kirko has been recently diagnosed with a rare cancer that has already weakened her considerably and will likely kill her within a year. She is keeping this information secret for now, knowing full well the influence it will have on the plotting and maneuvering that constantly surrounds her. That said, she has also decided to test various family members by giving them new opportunities to demonstrate their worthiness as beneficiaries in her will.

Experimental chemotherapy does exist for this type of cancer, and Madam Kirko could certainly afford it, but she fears that a) it will not work, and b) it will leave her a shadow of her current self. Already distrustful of doctors due to a series of unpleasant experiences involving the deaths of her husband and only son, Kirko plans to ignore the medical options (expect for pain medication) and to live out the remainder of her life as normally as possible. During this period her priorities will be to prepare an heir to take her place, to enjoy the presence of her family, and to help out each of her favorite charities and organizations one last time.

Bo Kirko, Pastry Chef

"Ze food, she is ze language of love."

Bo Kirko likes to think of himself as a dangerously sexy French Antonio Banderas, and although he is neither French nor Antonio Banderas, he is a good dancer, a great cook, and to quote a number of his female associates, "a bit odd but a fine piece of eye-candy." Truly, Bo has always loved the ladies. It's a trait that got him into no small amount of trouble when he was younger, and after one particularly memorable night following a very high-class party thrown by his aunt, Agatha Kirko, he found himself being sent to a private institute for boys. In France. Aunt Agatha, he discovered, had extreme ways of making her displeasure known.

Bo returned to the United States two years later and eventually ended up in culinary school. His previously unexplored talents with food preparation

(Superb)

Public Speaking -- 15

(Great)

Quirks: Distrusts members of medical professions

Enjoys betting on horse races

Proud (-1 to orders, insults, or social slights)

Sensitive about appearing ill

Donates generously to charities

Qualities:

Expert Businesswoman

Expert Millionaire

Poor Health

Bo Kirko

ST: 10 **(Fair)**

DX: 11 **(Fair)**

IQ: 9 **(Mediocre)**

HT: 10 **(Fair)**

Speed: 5.25; **Move:** 5

Dodge: 8

Description:

Mid-20s; 5'11", 150 lbs; lean; thin mustache & tousled black hair; always has a genuine smile for a lady.

Advantages:

Handsome

Disadvantages:

Lecherousness (12)

Skills:

Carousing -- 12 **(Good)**

Cooking (Baking) -- 16

(Superb)

Dancing -- 11 **(Fair)**

Fast-Talk -- 10 **(Fair)**

Gambling -- 10 **(Fair)**

Languages:

blossomed. Madam Kirko has since offered him the job of pastry chef aboard the Dermochelys. Implied in this proposition was that he could find himself in her good graces once more, should he manage to avoid disappointing her a second time.

Taking the job was probably a mistake. While most of the time Bo is too busy and too "behind the scenes" to meet someone, he has already managed to have several brief relationships in the few months he has been aboard. Only one of them has ended exceptionally badly thus far, but he is fairly certain word didn't get back to his aunt. At least, she hasn't mentioned it yet if it did, but it's really only a matter of time before she hears about something that does not meet with her approval.

Margaret "Kansas" Spearman, Security

"I know you city folk are big on formality, but I'd be mighty grateful if you just called me Kansas."

Margaret was the Spearman's sixth child; the one that Mrs. Spearman was sure would -- at long last -- be a girl. Unfortunately, she was wrong. When she died while giving birth her husband, in an attempt to follow her wishes, gave their new son the name she had chosen months before.

Sixteen years later Margaret joined the US Marine Corps. He did this for three reasons. First, he refused to become a farmer like his father. Second, he felt the need to prove himself as a man. Third, the Korean War was in full swing and as far as Margaret was concerned signing up with one of the armed forces was the only proper path for a young man to take . . . even if he did have to sneak out of the house one night with his few belongings in a sack, hitch a ride to the nearest big city, and lie about his age to get in. He was almost immediately tagged with the nickname "Kansas" in honor of his accent and his farm-boy physique.

To this day Margaret is certain he did the right thing. After the war was over he left the Marines to pursue a career in security, eventually developing a company dedicated to exactly that purpose. He officially retired from that job almost six years ago, leaving the business to his younger partners. Unofficially, however, there are still a few individuals, organizations, and small companies that prefer to contract with him personally from time to time.

People who meet Margaret generally find him to be quite congenial, if soft spoken. He is very fit and keeps himself that way by lifting weights and running several miles early every morning. Margaret always introduces himself as Kansas Spearman, though he will not go out of his way to explain the origin of his nickname or even that it is a nickname at all.

Madam Kirko has a long history with Margaret, hiring him whenever she feels the need for a stronger security presence. When in this position on board the Dermochelys Margaret works closely with the Second Officer, who in addition to many other duties acts as the ship's security officer. Margaret is one of the very few individuals on the Dermochelys with access to firearms. He does not, however, carry one as part of his normal routine.

Ellda Wedder, Hairdresser/Gift Shop Attendant/Lounge Assistant

-- English (Native)
-- French (Accented)
Rapier -- 11 (*Fair*)
Savoir-Faire (High Society) -- 10 (*Fair*)
Sex Appeal -- 14 (*Great*)

Quirks:

Speaks with a bad French accent when making a pass.
Smells faintly of lilac.
Incorporates garlic into his dishes whenever possible.
Always practices safe sex.
Tries to hide that he is related to Agatha Kirko.

Qualities:

Expert Roguish
Handsomeness
Good Social Charm
Good Chef
Poor Lecherousness

Margaret "Kansas" Spearman

ST: 12 (*Good*)
DX: 12 (*Good*)
IQ: 10 (*Fair*)
HT: 11 (*Fair*)
Speed: 6; Move: 6
Dodge: 9

Description:

About 70; 6'3", 210 lbs; still muscular & fit, but old war wound in right shoulder acts up when the weather is bad; thick grey hair.

Advantages:

Fearlessness +2

Disadvantages:

Honesty
Sense of Duty (U.S. Marines)

Skills:

Body Language -- 12

"Oh, no . . . not again!"

No matter how many times she blames her troubles on her supposed clumsiness, Ellda Wedder knows it isn't the truth. Things have gone wrong at the worst possible moment far too often in her life. Breaking her leg just before her last dance recital, having two flat tires on the way to her best friend's wedding, being the only one (out of 23) caught by police at an unauthorized skinny dipping party at the city pool . . . The list goes on and on, and those are just the major ones. She can't even begin to remember all of the little things -- the dropped china, the lost papers, the social gaffes -- that have constantly plagued her life.

Deep down, Ellda believes that she is cursed. She has no idea who might have done it, or why, or even how, but it is the only explanation that makes sense to her. Aware of how other people will likely react to such a belief, she keeps it to herself. This has not stopped her from taking advantage of assorted classes and clubs at her college in an attempt to learn more. By familiarizing herself with all manner of religions and occult ideas she hopes to find something that will break her curse. Her efforts thus far have had no effect.

Ellda signed up to work on the Dermochelys in hopes of learning more about the occult practices in the Caribbean while they toured the area. Unfortunately, her chances to leave the ship on such occasions have been next to non-existent. The money she is making will help pay for her next year of school, and she has acquired a couple trinkets thanks to passengers who are willing to do a little shopping for her, but this hasn't prevented her from becoming somewhat depressed about the whole situation.

Adventure Seeds

- Madam Kirko is throwing a three-day fund-raising cruise for a potential presidential candidate. Many big names will be there: political figures, movie stars, media darlings, and the very rich. Security will be at an all-time high, but will it be enough? At least one group believes it will not be. They intend to take the entire boat hostage and collect ransoms for as many people as they can. One or two of the crew/staff will be in on the plan. A couple of others managed to get included as entourage members of guests. The rest will drop onto the ship from a helicopter on the second day of the cruise (after the bridge has been secured). With the remainder of the vessel seized, the kidnappers will set a new course for an island in the Caribbean.
- It was supposed to be a three-hour tour. The real question now is: Who spent points on Survival (Island/Beach)?
- The Dermochelys has been rented for a cruise/convention by a group of seemingly unrelated individuals. As no non-members are to be allowed onboard, PCs will need to be included as normal staff/crew, as undercover investigators or observers for Madam Kirko or some other agency, or as accidental passengers -- perhaps the victims of a shipwreck who get picked up at sea. It should soon become apparent to those paying careful attention that the other passengers are not quite normal. They talk amongst themselves about things that happened centuries ago as if they had been there, tell tales about those who are gone, and sometimes mutter in very old languages. The truth is that none of the passengers is under 200 years old -- some are over 1000 -- but how this has come to pass varies from person to person. Careful investments have provided enough of them with plenty of money for a trip

(Good)

Criminology/TL8 -- 10

(Fair)

First Aid/TL8 -- 10 (Fair)

Fishing -- 12 (Good)

Guns/TL8 (Pistol, Rifle) -
- 13 (Good)

Intelligence Analysis/TL8
-- 14 (Great)

Karate -- 11 (Fair)

Languages:

-- English (Native)

Naturalist -- 8 (Mediocre)

Observation -- 15 (Great)

Seamanship/TL8 -- 10

(Fair)

Swimming -- 11 (Fair)

Tactics -- 12 (Good)

Quirks:

Dislikes anyone who insists on calling him Margaret.

Always wears a baseball cap with the logo of his security agency.

Collects books on fly fishing.

Arrives 10 minutes early for any meeting.

Still doesn't consider himself a "city person."

Qualities:

Expert Security Officer

Good Gunplay

Good Fearlessness

Poor Honesty

Ellda Wedder

ST: 10 (Fair)

DX: 10 (Fair)

IQ: 12 (Good)

HT: 8 (Mediocre)

Speed: 4.5; Move: 4

Dodge: 7

Description:

Early 20s; 5'6", 140 lbs; average build; very pale

such as this, and it gives them the chance to relax their barriers a bit.

- Other variations include conventions of angels, wizards, creatures that can pass for human, or wealthy LARP gamers staying in character for the entire cruise.
- Despite accepting her imminent death, Kirko's resolve to let nature take its course is not as firm as she believes. If there is a cure that does not involve modern medicine, and it works, Kirko will be very grateful.
- Ellda's unluckiness has vanished. She doesn't know how it happened, but her luck has been perfectly normal for the last three days. What she will soon realize is that one of the trinkets collected for her by a passenger is something special. The item is a rough-worn bracelet of hand-carved wooden beads on bedraggled string. The largest bead is a sculpture of a turtle with odd markings etched into its back, though as far as Ellda can tell the markings have no specific significance. Unfortunately, the unluckiness is not gone; it is simply transferred. About every 50 hours -- provided Ellda is wearing the bracelet -- her bad luck is shifted to the person nearest to her.
 - Rumors will begin circulating that the Dermochelys is an ill-fated ship, which Madam Kirko may end up wanting investigated. It would be most unfortunate if one of her very important guests were to be cursed.
 - One of the PCs, on board for an entirely unrelated reason, is hit with 50 hours of bad luck.
- A death on board in the middle of a cruise has everyone on edge. The cause of death is not obvious, and without a physician on board a useful autopsy is unavailable. Was it murder? Is it a disease? Can anyone figure it out before more bodies start appearing?
- There has been no communication with the Dermochelys since a freak storm grew up around it nearly 24 hours ago. Madam Kirko sent a rescue team out as soon as the storm cleared, but all contact with them was lost shortly after the vessel was sighted. A second team is now being formed -- a team with more expertise and more firepower than the first . . .
 - When the second team helicopters in they find the Dermochelys adrift and unresponsive. There is no sign of the first team, and between the cluttered state of the deck and the ongoing choppy seas landing is not an option. As the team members rappel down to the ship there is a flash of light above them and the helicopter spins out of control. Only by releasing themselves and dropping can the drop team have a chance at survival. Those who make it to the Dermochelys find it devoid of life, but with no bodies and no signs of struggle. They will also discover that none of their electrical equipment works.
 - Possible explanations might include high-tech pirates, aliens, spirits, or mer-people.

yellowish-brown eyes; light brown hair in a ponytail.

Advantages:

None

Disadvantages:

Unluckiness

Skills:

Languages:

-- English (Native)

Literature -- 10 (*Fair*)

Occultism (Curses) -- 12

(*Good*)

Professional Skill

(Hairdresser) -- 14 (*Good*)

Swimming -- 8

(*Medicore*)

Theology (Comparative) -

- 12 (*Good*)

Writing -- 12 (*Good*)

Quirks:

Always wears a piece of religious jewelry.

Hangs multiple religious icons on her walls.

Superstitious with regard to good & bad luck.

Constantly refers to herself as being clumsy.

Believes that she has been cursed.

Qualities:

Expert Hairdresser

Good Occultist

Good Writer

Poor Luck

Upgrading

The Dermochelys was designed for a low-fantasy TL8 setting, but it could easily be boosted to take advantage of higher levels of magic, technology, and weirdness. For example, strange energies emanating from secretly installed objects in the engine room or bridge could provide the ship with time or dimension hopping capability, the capacity to teleport, or force shielding that allows the entire vessel to safely sink beneath the waves for extended periods of time.

Maps

The Dermochelys



[*click for larger image*](#)

Dermochelys Deck Plans



[*click for larger image*](#)

- **Sun Deck:** About half of the Sun Deck is open space oft-decorated with deckchairs and beach towels, but it can double as a helicopter landing pad. The other half of the deck is devoted to the bridge and meeting rooms. Lifeboats/excursion craft on the aft section of this deck line both sides of the ship.
 1. **Bridge** -- There are at least three crew-members on the bridge at all times. It is the location of all of the ship's navigation systems, most of the communications equipment, and the weapons locker.
 2. **Staff Room** -- This small room provides the on-duty bridge crew with a nearby head and kitchenette.
 3. **Captain's Cabin** -- This small but comfortable cabin allows the captain to remain near the bridge when resting.
 4. **Meeting Rooms** -- Large tables and top-of-the-line audio-visual equipment dominate these rooms. They are primarily used for closed business meetings.
 5. **Reception Area** -- This area can serve either as a small observation lounge or as a place for subordinates to wait for individuals in the meeting rooms. An elevator is here, as is a spiral staircase leading down to the other decks.
- **Promenade Deck:** Of note on this deck is the promenade that encircles it, the observation and aft lounges, and the top portion of Madam Kirko's suite. All other rooms are passenger cabins, each beautifully furnished and featuring a private bathroom and a safe.
 1. **Observation Lounge** -- Cozy and surrounded by windows, this small lounge provides an excellent view.
 2. **Kirko's Suite (Upstairs)** -- The starboard room acts as Madam Kirko's onboard office and reception area.

The port room is her personal lounge, complete with mini-bar and entertainment center.

3. **Hallway** -- The hallway provides access to the elevator, the spiral staircase, and the promenade.
4. **Aft Lounge** -- Much larger than its forward counterpart, this lounge offers passengers a full bar and, when legal, a wide selection of gambling opportunities.
- **Ballroom Deck:** In addition to its namesake, this deck is the location of several passenger cabins and the bottom half of Kirko's suite.
 1. **Ballroom** -- This stunning ballroom extends to the outside to allow for dancing under the stars.
 2. **Kirko's Suite (Downstairs)** -- Both rooms are luxury bedrooms, with Kirko using the starboard one. The other is reserved for her personal guests.
 3. **Hallway** -- The hallway provides access to the elevator and the spiral staircase.
- **Main Deck:** Most passenger services, and several cabins, are located on this deck.
 1. **Salon/Gift Shop/Gym** -- The salon (port) and gift shop (starboard) are generally only available during normal cruises. The well-equipped gym, however, can be used at any time.
 2. **Library** -- This room contains an extensive collection of books, music, and movies. Playing cards and a variety of board games are also available.
 3. **Hallway** -- The hallway provides access to the elevator, the spiral staircase, and the exit hatches.
 4. **Dining Room** -- During normal cruises the dining room has self-serve buffets in place around-the-clock. During more stately functions these buffets are often removed to make room for more tables.
 5. **Galley** -- At least one chef is available at all hours.
 6. **Walk-in Refrigerator & Freezer** -- Both of these are kept very well stocked.
- **Below Deck:** This area is not intended for passengers. It contains storage areas, the ship's engines and mechanical systems, and the staff/crew cabins. These functional cabins fit two to three people each and many share a bathroom. The larger cabins (with private bathrooms) are reserved for higher ranking crewmembers.
 1. **Storage** -- Extra luggage and crew supplies are kept here.
 2. **Laundry** -- These facilities are not available to guests, although important passengers occasionally may be allowed to use them.
 3. **Control Room** -- The ship's systems can be controlled from this much quieter location, rather than requiring the crew to go into the engine room.
 4. **Engine & Utilities Room** -- This large area is the location of the engines, the water purification, heating, and air conditioning systems, and a small machine shop.
 5. **Storage** -- This large, well-organized hold contains everything from foodstuffs to engine parts.

Getting Educated

by Keith MacKenzie

In roleplaying games, we are told, there are no winners or losers. This is only correct in that the rules of the game do not define the victory conditions or indications of defeat. RPGs do, in fact, have winners and possibly some losers, but whether or not a player is a winner or loser is dependent upon that player's subjective victory conditions. Some victory values are more oriented toward the player himself. If a player had fun, it might be considered a victory. If everyone had fun, it's a major victory. If a player's creativity or language and social skills improved it is a win. Possible terms of victory for a player might include character values such as character level, skills, treasure, body count, collateral damage, sanity, reputation, political power or in some games, just surviving the adventure is a huge victory. Most of these just happen as a result of play and more depth is really not needed. In many games, body count and collateral damage lead to character levels, cash and reputation follow, then political power. Skills, on the other hand, are a more variable commodity, due to the many ways there are to learn. This article shows some alternate systems games can use to improve skills; the advice and observations are generic, with some specific information for *GURPS Third Edition*.

Learning by Doing

Learning by doing is the follow through of practice, practice, practice. Chaosium used this method exclusively for skill advancement. During an adventure, a player that successfully used a skill would make a note. At the end of the adventure (or session in some cases) the player would roll against the skill again. If the roll *failed*, something was learned from the experience. Having to fail it shows that a previously unknown aspect of the skill was discovered. The better a PC was at the skill, the harder it is to find something new. In other games, such as zzGURPS,xx a skill used in an adventure may be raised if the character points are available.

Advantages: Rewards characters for trying new things and actually represents improvement through experience.

Disadvantages: Players start doing useless things just to get the skill check for advancement.

Notes: Not all skills should be subject to learning by doing. A successful use of a knowledge skill such as history or literature is unlikely to teach anything new to the practitioner, and wild swings and blind firing will not develop skill regardless of the degree of success.

GURPS 3rd Edition optional rules: If a skill is used successfully in the adventure, in a way that contributes to the story, a note is made. At the end of the session a 3d6 roll is made against the skill, if this roll fails, ½ point may be put into the skill. This does not require the expenditure of unused character points.

Learning from a Master

The best way to learn to do something is to have a skilled professional teach you to do it. The student gains benefits from the good and bad experiences of the mentor. Learning in this manner takes many forms. Combat skills might be learned individually or in small groups. Physical and social sciences might be learned in a lecture or smaller classroom. Art and craft skills are best taught in more of a laboratory/workshop/studio environment, where practical application of technique goes further than description. Sportsman skills including sports and natural skills both are most easily learned in the environments where they are practiced.

Advantages: Down time between adventures can still be productive.

Disadvantages: Every PC will now devote 100% of non-adventuring time to some form of learning.

Notes: Many skills cannot be learned this way, either because teachers cannot be found ("I'd like to enroll in the Lucid

Dreaming class . . .") or because it's the sort of skill that can only be learned by practicing. Learning by watching others also falls into this category.

GURPS 3rd Edition optional rules: A teacher with a higher base skill in the subject than the student makes a roll against his teaching skill after 100 hours of training to see if the knowledge is conveyed in a comprehensible manner. For every three successes, the student adds 1 to his IQ plus 1 for each level of eiditic memory, and then rolls against it to see if the knowledge is comprehended. A third roll is made against the skill minus the difference between the teachers skill and the students skill to see if anything new is learned. A failure allows the PC to spend up to 1 point on the skill from unspent character points. If the student is learning by watching, the teaching skill is 5. Teachers may have up to twice as many students as their teaching skill, each student above that reduces the effective skill by 1, except lecture topics. For lecture topics, students do not receive bonuses for the teachers success, but do take penalties if the teacher fails.

By the Book

Ancient Tomes contain the knowledge needed to summon elder beings and the local bookstore has a book to teach every skill. Books are a great way to learn skills. They have the benefit of working with you on your time, are portable, and can actually be referenced when you need it. Almost any skill that can be taught by a teacher, can be taught by a book, but usually not to as high a skill level as the teacher could. Knowledge skills such as history or literature are the most conducive to book learning. Mental skills with physical components such as painting or lockpicking are the next easiest type of skills for books to teach. Purely physical skills can be taught by books, but not actually learned until practice occurs.

Advantages: Learn at your own pace, in your own place. Take it with you, Use it until you learn it, than sell it. The book may have pictures, maps or diagrams.

Disadvantages: For most skills reading about it is just not enough, even with self practice. Also there are a great number of poorly written books and well written books by bad teachers. There is almost no way to tell beforehand if it is a good source for learning.

Notes: The Foxfire Books, The Boy Scout Handbook, The Machinery Handbook, The Bible, and the Chemical Rubber Company Reference all contain everything you ever need to know, depending upon what sorts of questions you ask.

GURPS 3rd Edition optional rules: Books are rated for their skill range and for their teaching skill. Skill ranges are Beginner (skill 4-12), Intermediate (10-14), Advanced (13-18), and specialty* (16+). The teaching skill of the book is equal to the lesser of the authors writing and teaching skills plus 1/2 the margin of success of that roll with a limit of the other skill. Example: Arthur writes a book, his teaching skill is 14 and his writing is 12. He rolls a 5 against 12 for his writing roll. The teaching skill of the book is $12 + 3.5 (1/2 * (12 - 5)) = 15.5$, which becomes 14 because of Arthurs skill limit. If the readers skill is within the range for the book, a roll against the lesser of IQ or the books teaching skill is made and 1/2 point plus 1/2 point per margin of success may be applied to the skill from unspent character points up to the limit of the book. You cannot learn skill 13 from a beginner book, etc.

* Specialty Books are not rated for skill but for point value and usually are from 1/2 to 4 points. If a reader has a skill of 15 or higher in the skill (or in that specialty) after each 100 hours of study a roll against the lesser of the books skill or the readers IQ will apply 1/2 CP to the skill. This may be repeated until the maximum points for the book have been taken. Example: A 4 point specialty book could be used successfully 8 times.

It Goes Straight To Your Brain

Encephalagraphic Educators or other speed-learning methods are frequently available in high-tech societies. These function almost identically to books except for the time consumed and rather than writing the applicable skill is Computer Programming with an Educator specialty. Ideally, these work perfectly, but if they did, wouldn't everybody know everything about everything? Why wouldn't you learn it all? The real deal is that they don't always work, they

don't always work well and they don't always work safely. There is a chance of a bad connection or for some reason it just didn't stick to the student's brain. Sometimes the overlay isn't quite right and the student impresses his girlfriend by ordering five pounds of butter in Thai. Sometimes damage occurs, after all we were pumping electrons right into the electrical center of the body.

Advantages: anything can be learned this way. Physical or mental skills. It's quick. It's beneficial, what you learn will be useful, probably.

Disadvantages: It might be dangerous, and no sense of satisfaction for having learned something.

GURPS 3rd Edition optional rules: Use the same rules as learning from a book, but each half point is 6 hours of imprinting. If the PC has unspent character points, let him spend them on the acquired skills. If the points are not available roll against the PC's HT minus the number of points in the hole the character is. If the roll is a critical success the skill is learned, but character points are owed. If the roll is a success, remove the necessary points from another skill at random, the brain was full something had to be discarded. If the roll failed but a straight HT would have succeeded, the skill is not learned and a mental or physical disadvantage is gained. If a straight HT roll would have failed, a disadvantage and loss of another skill occur and the skill is not learned. If the roll is a critical failure roll against HT for each attribute. If the roll for ST is failed, a palsy is developed and all physical actions are at -3. If DX is failed, all fine motor control actions are at -3. If IQ is failed, IQ drops by 2 from brain damage. If HT is failed, use of 1 limb or sense organ is lost. On a critical failure double the results for ST, DX and IQ. Brain death occurs if HT is failed critically.

Immersion

A few skills can be learned by immersion. Most often languages but there may be others. Stuck on the island of TongaBonga our hero learned TongaBongese in a short time.

Advantages: Quick and effective.

Disadvantages: Usually only usable from untrained to minorly skilled (½ point in **GURPS** terms).

Notes: Area knowledge and Savoir-Faire (local customs) can be learned at the same time.

GURPS 3rd Edition optional rules: If the character is subject to this learning mode and indicates that he is trying to communicate with the locals, award ½ point each in language, and savoir-faire after a week.

Pyramid Review

Trojan War: Roleplaying in the Age of Homeric Adventure (for *d20 System*)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Aaron Rosenberg

Cover by James Ryman

Illustrated by Drew Baker, Kent Burles, Caleb Cleveland, Jonathon Kirtz, Britt Martin, Beth Trott, Joe Wigfield, & Lisa Wood

Cartography by Shawn Brown

160-page perfect bound black and white book; \$27.95

For the fifth entry in their Mythic Vistas line, Green Ronin revisit the Ancient World, returning to the Bronze Age first seen in [Testament: Roleplaying In The Biblical Era](#). Almost in the wake of the blockbuster *Troy* comes ***Trojan War: Roleplaying in the Age of Homeric Adventure***, a *d20 System* treatment of Homer's *Iliad*. This is the opportunity for the players to sail with the Achaen (or Greek) army under Menelaus and Agamemnon to retrieve the love struck Helen or to join the armies of the nine dynasties under King Priam to defend the city in the valley before it. They will fight alongside the heroes of either side: Achilles, Odysseus, and Patroclus for the Achaens, and Hector, Paris, and Sarpedon for the Trojans. Perhaps the characters will become champions themselves, each leading a company out to face the enemy; sure in the victory already dedicated to the god whose favor they have gained . . . On occasion, the gods themselves will take to the battlefield both to aid their favored heroes and combat their Olympic rivals.

This is a very humanocentric setting, the only other race available being Divine Offspring, the product of a union between man and god. Stronger, faster, taller, larger than life, and in knowing their heritage, Divine Offspring suffer from overconfidence at best and arrogance at worst . . . which is all reflected by a lower Intelligence. Several new character classes are available, plus several from the core *d20 System*. The new classes are the Charioteer, masters of the horse and chariot, and the Dedicated Warrior that replaces the Paladin, fighting and questing in the name of a chosen god. The hardier Magician replaces the Wizard, casting spells powered from the world around him through a self-constructed wand; and the Priest replaces the Cleric, being a mediator between men and the gods, interpreting omens, and having a more spiritual role. The Homeric world values combat prowess, persuasiveness, and an understanding of the gods' will, all of which are reflected in the three Prestige Classes. Orators are demagogues, generals, and politicians; the Runner is capable of great feats of speed, perhaps like Achilles able to outpace chariots; and Seers serve as advisors and interpreters of omens. Other classes allowed include the Barbarian (for non-Achaen or Trojan), Bard, Druid, Fighter, Ranger, Rogue, and Sorcerer, plus the Noble and Witch classes from the publisher's other titles. The setting is also very male-centric, though there is room for female characters, perhaps as Amazons.

Magic in the Homeric age is rare, little used by the gods themselves, and since it is not a gift from them, its use is mistrusted by most people, as are magicians. While the GM in several ways can interpret its appearance, Homeric magic makes the *d20 System's* schools work differently. Necromancy deals with spirits, as the undead do not exist; evocation manipulates existing forces, like a bonfire, rather than creating them like a fireball; conjuration can only draw from four planes; and creation is frowned upon, the gods disliking mortals being able to create something from

nothing. Other schools remain unchanged. Divine spellcasters call directly upon the gods to cast their spells.

But *all* characters believe in the gods, and most will make offerings to them as proof of their devotion. Retaining a god's favor means a character can call for a divine favor -- increased hit points, healing, smiting a foe for more damage, bonuses to saving throws and skill checks, and even seeking divination. Whether the favor will be granted depends on the character's Piety score, initially at zero, or slightly more for Divine Offspring. It is gained by making sacrifices . . . of meat, wine, or rarely a youth or maiden; dedicating a victory to a god, building shrines, temples, and boats; or just by being courteous to a stranger. Likewise, committing sins will reduce Piety, leading to contempt, ostracism, and even divine displeasure. This can extend beyond the individual to his family, his village, and his nation!

Trojan War adapts the Biblical Battlefield Resolution System from **Testament** to handle the clashes integral to the *Iliad*. In the Homeric Battlefield Resolution System, troops are more mobile, able to advance and retreat from their initial positions. Forces, under the command of Captains have the same stats as characters, allowing easy interaction between leaders and troops. Several Battlefield Feats support the system, divided into Qualities (for example, "Battle-Hardened" or "Faith in a Captain"), Maneuvers ("Charge," "Fight Cautiously"), and Special ("Disquieting Yell," "Heroic Stand"). The various feats can be assigned and combined to create individual units. Some personal feats tie into the system. "Battlefield Seasoned," for example, allowing a character to retain his Dexterity bonus when joining a force; "Distinctive" makes a captain stand out on the battlefield; while "Lion of the Field" lets a character inflict his full damage upon an enemy force. Certainly this last feat makes a character a force to be reckoned with on the battlefield.

The setting is supported with summaries of both of Homer's epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, details of Bronze Age equipment, and descriptions of both the gods and the great captains of both sides. Under equipment, the book covers food and drink, currency, and goods as well as weapons of war. This includes chariots, armor (which must be purchased piece by piece, and not as suits), and weapons, though none of these are illustrated. Only the 11 of the major gods are described, covering in turn each deity's portfolio, domains, holy symbol, clerical training, quests, prayers, shrines, rites, herald, allies, favored weapons, and attitude to the War. Appropriately they are not given statistics, as no character should be capable of facing and defeating a god. The various captains are there as companions, commanders, rivals, enemies, and optionally, even as player characters.

Besides the backgrounds on the Achaens and Trojans, there is also a guide to Homeric monsters, though these are more relevant to the *Odyssey*, but a party could encounter them if they stray from the battlefield. Few are given statistics, as most come from the **Monster Manual**, while others can be imported from both **Testament** and the **Book of Fiends**. Rules also allow the GM to create monsters of legendary stature and capable of testing the heroes of the age. Few magic items are included, as opposed to the many different artifacts to found in the hands of various NPCs.

As a campaign, **Trojan War** is different from most, centering on a single battlefield over the course of nine years. Yet there are notable events both before and after the conflict, from assembling the host to getting home and finding great changes there. The different stages of the War are covered along with suggestions on how to game in each. This leads into discussion of a **Trojan War** campaign's epic nature, necessary because what is stake here, is the fate of nations, something that the players should have the opportunity to affect this destiny through their actions. The player characters should be the leading figures of the nations involved, if not descended from the gods themselves. And with such high stakes and lineages involved, the War cannot be fought without raising the ire of one or more of the Olympians, for the gods all have their favorites in this war.

Physically, **Trojan War** is of course, up to Green Ronin's usual high standards. Some of the artwork might not be as good as the majority, but none of it is bad. Perhaps the book's only real negatives are the lack of illustrations for the arms and armor, and that the maps could have been better.

Short of detailing a ready-made campaign, **Trojan War** gives everything a GM might need to run a game set before, during, and after the most famous conflict of any legend. Its focus is narrower than other Mythic Vistas titles, which isn't surprising given that the War lasts just nine years. Perhaps lacking the "wow" factor of the early titles in the series -- **Testament**, [***Skull & Bones: Swashbuckling Horror in the Golden Age of Piracy***](#), and **Mindshadows** -- **Trojan War: Roleplaying in the Age of Homeric Adventure** is still a fine supplement by any means.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

The Nameless Mist

Written by Todd A. Breitenstein, Les Simpson, Robert Defendi, Frank Russell, & Patrick Kapera

Art by Dave Aikins

Layout & design by Todd A. Breitenstein

64-page scenario book, 24 full-color encounter disks, four full-color tiles; \$9.99

Considering Twilight Creations, Inc. has had a pretty good quid pro quo with other companies in the industry, it seems strange to think their horror game ***When Darkness Comes*** . . . wouldn't have plugged a fairly obvious hole before now. ***The Nameless Mist*** comes to the rescue, filling in some of those blanks.

The theme this time around is H.P. Lovecraft and his mythological settings, specifically Miskatonic. The four tiles added to the mix of playing boards represent the infamous seat of lower learning, Miskatonic University. There are classrooms and offices, and one tile is given over wholly to the dreaded library.

The tokens have personalities like the snooty-nosed professors and librarians, the cultist, and the voodoo practitioner. Less personable but still vital are critters: gugs, ghouls, and even a disk for one of the Big Guys. And it wouldn't be a Cthulhuesque party if you didn't have disturbing books to check out, including the fabled Necronomicon, and equipment to put their contents back where they came from (like elder signs).

The back of the game says there are new rules, but the rulebook admits this really means a new take on Willpower. Specifically, WP is now -- what else? -- your sanity. Run out and you cannot take actions, though you can recover it. Reading a book lowers your WP, but it also makes monsters easier to kill (and reduces the victory point awards).

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The adventures are kind of a letdown; the Variable Tile System isn't getting much of a workout in that most seem to be "pick up items while finding the important clue, move to the next one on the next board, and eventually confront the big bad guy." Since they included "his" disk, it makes sense that he'll keep showing up as the story's centerpiece, but it's hard to really get caught up in beating super-baddies with the kinds of gear you find in a ***When Darkness Comes*** . . . scenario. Further, it seems like one of the enemy disks always turns out to be the main man. For a mysterious force, he sure does show up an awful lot, in vulgar ways.

As for the gist of the adventures: The crew must track down a killer, who may be a demon (or that big bad guy, again); a learned man is driven crazy and starts killing people; books disappear from the library and the investigators have to track them to their otherworldly hiding place or destroy the (person?) who's stealing them.

In the eponymous "The Nameless Mist," the heroes are one step behind the previous team, and find themselves either tracking their whereabouts or cleaning up their messes as they go. Finally, a GM-run adventure places the characters in the role of agents for a generic, secretive, anti-weird-events bureau, trying to locate a professor's killers before their master plan reaches fruition. "Mist" is the best of the lot, as it takes pains to unite the introductory fiction with the ongoing action, while the last is pretty much the least as it points up too many of the limitations of the system. (Players won't find themselves at their most riveted while rolling to get directions.) The story also urges the GM to

push players along lest events catch up to their PCs, but subsequent sections clearly assume things are only going to turn out one way anyway.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

There is one bright spot to this: While it's true the adventures are underwhelming, the fiction that precedes the scenarios in these sets -- it's terrific. The last piece reads like a traditional game module and so is too homogenous to be thought of as a real narrative, and the first tale seems to start out just a little tepid, but even that one ends strong. The stories are well-crafted, well-written, and in some cases out-and-out clever, bringing small story elements to the fore just when you'd forgotten about them.

You should be able to get away with the original set and this one to play things out, though extra tiles may help alleviate some of the scenario "sameness." While some of Dave Aikins' artwork seems slightly inferior to previous ***When Darkness Comes*** . . . sets, other pieces are even better than normal, more than making up for it. The package is what you've gotten in the other entries into the series, but the rulebook is an oddity -- the pages feel really thick, while the cover is distressingly flimsy stock (possibly the first time a game's cover wasn't the equal of its pages).

Having some of the new pieces might be enticing, especially so you can brag about your Miskatonic U tiles, but while the writing is fine stuff, the game materials accompanying ***The Nameless Mist*** aren't going to get the blood flowing in any but the most literal sense.

--Andy Vetromile

Time Goes By, So Quickly . . . And Time Can Do So Much

This week the conclave of cardinals elected a new pope, and I'm fairly certain I wasn't even considered beyond the first day.

I found this election particularly interesting, since it's the first one in modern times (and by "modern," I mean "held at a point after I stopped eating paste as much as I do today"). So much has changed since Pope John Paul II was elected -- historically, technologically, socially, and no doubt some other adverbs I've forgotten. This fact was particularly driven home when a commentator pointed out that one of the elements which probably influenced the cardinals' decision in 1978 was that Poland (from whence John Paul came) was an outspoken Catholic outpost against godless Soviet Communism. In the intervening decades, the threat of Soviet Communism has declined to a level that the only outposts necessary to defend against it is a lemonade stand and a rolled-up newspaper. (This, of course, assumes you don't believe everything you read in Tom Clancy novels, where Soviet Communism rises like a Phoenix at the earliest opportunity. **Chapter 1:** "What's that?" "It looks like a prairie dog in a tutu." "IEEEEE! Time to revert to communism!")

Anyway, this is the first pope whose election was covered around the clock via cable news outlets and webcams, the first one whose election was speculated continuously online, and the first one who's started out with an e-mail address (benedictxvi@vatican.va). So it's safe to say that the world is a mighty different place than when the last one was elected.

And there are other circumstances in the real world where people can measure the passage of time by other events, comparing and contrasting what's changed. Some of these are fairly regular, such as the 76-year cycle of Halley's Comet, while others are less predictable, such as natural disasters, and various appointments for life. Obviously the time interval is the biggest factor that determines the magnitude of change in either case; the four-year span between U.S. presidential elections generally permit slight changes, while something like centennial celebrations allow for big changes in the interim.

Of course, even small intervals can allow for big changes. For example, the 1960 U.S. presidential election was the first one where television played a major roll, where the American people decided they would like a young, handsome man as their leader over an oily demonic ferret (a mistake the people would rectify a mere eight years later). But usually these changes are most noticeable when there's more time between them. For example, every time we let a decade or two pass between wars with, say, Germany or Iraq, we discover that all the rules are different. Sometimes these differences are mostly for observation and commentary; for example, it doesn't matter too much how greatly the world has changed between the 1910 and 1986 appearances of Halley's Comet. Other times, though, these differences are crucial. Countries who approached World War II similarly to World War I found themselves at a severe disadvantage in short order.

This similar compare-and-contrast enterprise can be applied to most gaming worlds (which should surprise absolutely none of our long-term readers). The obvious way is to take real-world examples and apply them to the gaming world. For example, the near-future *Shadowrun* universe heavily incorporated the next two Halley's Comet appearances of 2061 and 2137 into its continuity. As another example, how would the papal elections be different if the world developed super-powers in the time since the last pope? (If the thought of tiny microphones and pinhole cameras frightened the conclave organizers, imagine what the existence of beings with x-ray vision, flight, or telepathy could do.)

Of course, it's possible to create "new" periodic traditions. For example, maybe the PCs' home city has a "Celebration of Heroism" every 25 years . . . and the heroes have been active enough recently that there is an expectation of their involvement. Of course, one of the mistakes in creating these events is to ignore their long-term effects and focus entirely on the adventure this new tradition creates. Scientists have referred to this as the Zelda Effect, where

adventurers stumble across yet *another* "Gee, this event of great power and hope only happens once every 1,000" years . . . what could possibly go wrong?" situation. It's especially bad when the big-deal event is only referred to for the first time at the start of the adventure, and is never referred to again after the end of the adventure. Compare this to the 1986 Halley's Comet appearance, where you couldn't huck a rock without hitting a book about Halley's Comet, a television show or movie about Halley's Comet, souvenirs about Halley's Comet, or random bystanders who exclaim, "Ow! You hit me with a rock! . . . Which, now that I consider it, was quite similar to Halley's Comet." While you don't want these big-deal periodic events to overshadow *everything* else in a campaign, you don't want them to fade away to nothing almost immediately, either.

Paradoxically, humans like both repetition and advancement; sometimes these two factors collide, with interesting effect. Once the gamemaster has both the comfort of ritual and the challenge of advancement within a campaign world, all kinds of great story possibilities open up.

And if they're not interesting now, they may very well be at some point in the indeterminate future . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Icosahedron Adventures

Tudor's Guide to Angel's Harbor (Part I) Organizations and Neighborhoods of a Modern Superheroic *d20 System* Campaign

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Modern games usually take place in a world that feels very much like ours, but with a few differences. The differences may be minor, such as the number of shooting incidents a single cop can expect to get into over the course of a career or the exact location of stores in New York City, or it may be major, such as the addition of magic, psionics, aliens and/or superheroes. In either case, most GMs present the background of the world in one of two ways. Either they assume everything not specifically mentioned as different is the same as our world, or they go out of their way to make it clear the campaign world is notably different in many respects.

One of the ways a GM can express that second idea, that the campaign world is very different from the real one, is by creating new cities, neighborhoods, and businesses. A city where PCs in a hurry have the choice of Circus Burgers, Taco Castle, Pantheon Pizza or Samurai Takeout Teriyaki feels a little different from one sporting real-world fast food establishments. None of the new establishments need to be particularly unique, but the very fact that a campaign includes different businesses helps establish the idea that despite being modern, and possibly even set in the same country as the players, this campaign is "not like home."

The tone of a game can be further tweaked by adding or removing particularly outrageous businesses. For example, if the campaign has Temporal Express, for when it Absolutely, Positively Had To Be There Yesterday, PCs know the tech level for common people is high, and things may get a bit over-the-top. Similarly if you can order from the Ninja Rolls' Secret Delivery Restaurant, resulting in assassins sneaking the food into your refrigerator without you noticing, the campaign has taken a turn for the silly. Going the other direction, if the GM mentions that the Sends-A-Lot mass e-mail company has gone out of business because no one is stupid enough to spend any money on unsolicited e-mail advertising, players know some base assumptions have been made about how common citizens in that campaign behave.

Additionally, new businesses and places provide the benefit of a clean slate. Players may assume they know a lot about Circus Burgers because it has a clown as a mascot and reminds them of a real-world fast food place, but in reality they only know what they assume and the GM tells them. If it turns out Circus Burgers is run by the mob, or exclusively uses soy-based meat substitute, or is actually a conscientious corporation that improves any neighborhood it moves in to with neighborhood gardens and urban renewal projects, the players don't suffer the same disconnect they do if a real restaurant turned out to have the same quirks.

This article provides a look at the background of the fictional city of Angel's Harbor. Though specifically designed for a supers game, with a bit of work Angel's Harbor can be used as a setting (or one-shot vacation spot) for any modern game. Each of the entries below presents a fictional business, region or group that exist in Angel's Harbor. The main entry for each contain only common information anyone can turn up with minimal effort.

Further information, including secrets behind the scenes, are presented with information check DCs listed. Since this is a ***d20 System*** article, such DCs are designed for use with Gather Information, Knowledge (local) research or similar skills. The information is not broken down by skill -- it doesn't really matter what skill a PC uses to learn more about these places, just what information they can turn up. In most cases this information is just a sketch, leaving room for a GM to develop details to fit his campaign.

Districts

Angel's Harbor has a number of districts, the most famous of which are detailed in brief below. There are numerous less-interesting sections of the city which serve as home and often employment opportunity for the majority of the city's citizens. There are also a number of suburbs (such as Glitzeltown) which are technically outside Angel's Harbor proper.

Boarding Street

Originally a single street which was the location of numerous boarding houses in the late 1800s, usually taken up by students and miners. Now a self-sufficient community in itself, catering mostly to the middle class, although there are a few nice manors in the northern parts and some cheap housing in the southern parts. Many folk who make a decent but not great living elsewhere in Angel's Harbor reside here.

Information Checks

- **DC 15:** Nothing exciting or interesting happens here. It's almost *too* quiet.
- **DC 25:** Oddly, everything here is just as calm and normally as it seems.

The Circuit

The Circuit is the central section of Angel Harbor's business district. It is defined by a monorail system that loops around the entire area, with spokes going both into the Circuit (making it the easiest section of town to get around without a vehicle) and to outlying districts (allowing commuters easy access in and out). The Circuit is an area of high-rise skyscrapers, small but well-maintained parks, mid- and upper-end restaurants, and lots and lots of high-end businesses.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** The Circuit gives tax breaks to larger businesses, to encourage them to stay in the city. As a result it has little funding for its extensive mass transit and park system. Currently, Sterling Industries pays for most such services as a way of giving back to the community.
- **DC 20:** The Circuit is very vulnerable to severe weather. It has never been directly hit by a hurricane, and if it was most buildings would flood, mass transit would shut down, and power would be lost.

Coal Road

Section of a slum and several shanty towns wedged between the railroads, shipping yards and stockades of the Station on one side, and Demon's Hollow on the other. Mixed poor residential areas, "project" housing, and cheap by-the-hour or by-the-week motels and warehouses and companies who were built here when it was a nicer area, or need a cheap place to run business.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** When coal mining was the major industry of the area, Coal Road was a booming center for organized crime, prostitution and gambling. All that died out in the early 60s.
- **DC 20:** The current Coal Road region was build atop the old Coal Road area, which was destroyed in a fire. That Coal Road was itself built over buildings built in the bottom of a strip mine in the early 1800s.
- **DC 30:** There are a lot of buried buildings that can still be accessed from abandoned warehouses or the sewers, as well as sections of the original subway. These are sometimes still in great shape, and used as secret gathering places.

Demon's Hollow

Demon's Hollow is the unofficial name for the southernmost section of the city, which is a lowland slum. It is right next to the Circuit, but literally kept separate with a large wall built in the late 1970s. It is a place of crushing poverty, explosive crime rates, extensive homelessness, and colorful gangs who's "colors" often include matching make-up and unusual themes. The lowest district in the city, some of Demon's Hollow is actually below sea level, and floods in any serious storm.

Information Checks

- **DC 15:** The city council has given up on Demon's Hollow. Police rarely patrol there, only showing up if a situation develops that's likely to attract media attention. Vigilantes do most of the law enforcement, and as long as they keep things quiet and don't move to other sections of the city, the police are happy to let them.
- **DC 20:** The major gangs of Demon's Hollow -- the Vis, Black Angels, Fishhooks, Marrow, Heavy Hitters, Spackers, Viragos and Wolverines -- have a council which determines who has what territory, when gang wars are allowed, and what constitutes a major infraction of the rules. A gang that ignores the council is attacked by all other members. Minor gangs are client-groups of a major gang, and follow its rules.
- **DC 25:** Most Demon's Hollow gangs are actually agents of cults that have been in the Hollow for centuries. When exposed they pose as satanists, but in truth believe they worship older, more terrible gods. As a by-product, it's also the best place to buy occult books, and has many small cabals of "white magic" groups trying to clean the place up.
- **DC 30:** Unknown to the cults themselves, most of them are patsies for either the cabal of wealthy and powerful citizens of Club Dis or the Voskavitch Russian crime family.

Glitzeltown

In an effort to bring in new business and a higher tech base, the Angel's Harbor city council, along with the state legislature, wrote a number of tax benefits into law. The laws give extensive tax incentives, interest-free loans and even grants to companies during any period in which the company is "engaged in ongoing construction of buildings, development of technologies, or training of a majority of its employees." These are designed primarily for companies building new facilities or high tech research companies. However, a producer realized that a movie company, constantly building sets and always giving directions and instructions to its actors and crew, could technically qualify.

A few high-budget parties and back-room pay-offs later, the local authorities agreed. As a result, the cost of filming a movie in Angel's Harbor is enough cheaper than in other major cities in the US that a number of productions have begun moving into facilities just outside the city limits. This area is officially the Oakhame Edition, but is commonly known as Glitzeltown. A number of small-but-growing studios have moved into the area. Mostly these companies produce straight-to-video schlock, syndicated television shows in their waning seasons, educational films and pilots that move to bigger studios if they're picked up.

Many of the studios operate outside the normal unions and guilds that control television and film companies elsewhere in the US. The up side of this arrangement is that it's easier to break into these studios, and costs are kept down. The negative side is that actors and other employees are often very underpaid, directors and producers can take advantage of new hires with little fear of reprisal, and getting an acting job in Glitzeltown may not translate to a bigger career elsewhere. Stories of casting couch antics, drug-addicted employees, embezzlement, verbal abuse, fraud, plagiarism and even murder abound, and many are true.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** Glitzeltown is officially Oakhame Edition, and exists outside the Angel's Harbor city limits. As a result it has its own police force, though it pays Angel's Harbor for the right to use the city's firemen, sanitation, and other services.
- **DC 15:** Most homes and apartments in Glitzeltown are owned by studios, or owners/directors/producers who are directly involved with the studios. Thus it's cheap to live in the well-manicured and attractive parts of town as

long as the studios love you, but anyone who displeases the corporate masters of the city end up in the outlying slum.

- **DC 20:** The town council of Oakhame is run by studio executives, who keep a tight grip on the reigns of power. They control the well-paid (and corrupt) cops and judges, most businesses, and even a few local federal agents. The system will not help anyone bring down the studios in Glitzeltown -- you have to get such people into Angel's Harbor itself to have any hope of arresting or convicting them.
- **DC 25:** Most of the "independent" studios in Glitzeltown are actually owned and controlled by Sven-Ole Drokan, who is also head of the organized crime group that runs Glitzeltown. Drokan runs one of the most powerful organized crime groups in Germany, Sweden, Norway and Greenland, but has few holdings in the US. Wishing to be able to deal his smuggled knock-off goods directly to Americans, and establish a pipeline to South America, Drokan built Glitzeltown to be his foothold on a new continent. He can afford to lose money here for years, and does a great deal of legitimate business (particularly bad fantasy films) because of his love of old Hollywood films. But ultimately, he intends to be a major player in American organized crime.

Holly Hills

Holly Hills is the residential neighborhood for the rich and famous. It mostly contains mansions, gated communities, private clubs, and golf courses.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** Holly Hills has its own police force, which is more interested in keeping things quiet than justice.
- **DC 20:** The most powerful private club in the district is Club Dis. Officially a secret society with mostly hereditary membership, the club's Victorian and whispers of sex parties actually cover an efficient, dangerous power-gathering machine. However, the members of Club Dis never take illegal action within Holly Hills, in part to keep the rich and powerful residents of Angel's harbor from being inconvenienced by the club.

Mercedes Beach

Mercedes Beach is a popular vacation spot, with condos and time-share houses running along the best beachfront in Angel's Harbor. It includes the Stretch, a run of small mom-and-pop businesses right along the boardwalks, and Dock 51, a refurbished section of dock that has been taken over by tourist attractions, theme restaurants, and a small amusement park (Angel Island). Further from the Stretch is a less pleasant neighborhood are warehouses, small businesses, and a few residential regions. A number of warehouses have been used for questionable experiments and drug running over the decades, as evidence can be dumped easily in the harbor.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** A series of serial killing along the beach in the 1950s, 1970s, and 1990s hurt tourism, though in each case people returned once the murderers were caught.
- **DC 15:** Locals tend not to drink the city water here, as it tastes funny.
- **DC 25:** The killing sprees were all brought on by heavy storms, and generally included multiple, unrelated killers.
- **DC 35:** The ground here has been contaminated by experimental drugs and toxic waste dating back to the 1950s. When there's a heavy storm, the stuff often gets pushed up to the surface, where it appears as a foamy substance. Anyone exposed to too much of it becomes a raging psycho killer (the cause of the murder sprees in the past).

Slaughterhouse District

Once actually the location of hundreds of slaughterhouses (mostly of pigs shipped into Angel's Harbor by train), the Slaughterhouse District became more and more residential as the slaughterhouses closed down in the late 1800s. Because it was extremely cheap to buy land there, it became home of an art movement in the 1960s, which in time

made the area popular enough to draw in richer tenants. The art movement has largely been forced to Boarding Street and Coal Road by rising prices designed to draw in yuppies. The Slaughterhouse District is now a combination of warehouse nightclubs, over-priced art houses, and trendy residential options for the upper-middle class in the wealthy sections, and abandoned meat packing plants and crumbling warehouses in poorer, undeveloped regions.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** No art of any real quality is found here anymore, though the remaining art houses would snobbishly disagree.
- **DC 20:** A number of the underdeveloped sections of this district are actually haunted, while others are home of vast stores of negative psychic energy. As a result, they are the best place for certain kinds of dark rituals.

The Station

A long, narrow wedge of town that includes the port, the shipyards, stockades, commercial rail yards, and one nearly bankrupt dirigible company. In addition to commercial shipping and trucking, a lot of warehouses are built in this area. It's possible for cargo to move from any kind of transportation to another in the Station, and a great deal of the wealth Angel's Harbor enjoys comes from this region, though none of it seems to stay here.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** The canals, tunnels and bridges of the Station include extensive underground areas, as well as territory kept in near perpetual darkness by the shadows of the warehouses on one side, and the skyscrapers of the Circuit on the other.
- **DC 20:** Because it's the darkest section of town, and the one with the most stored goods, the crime rate per capita here is higher than anywhere else in the city, including Demon's Hollow.
- **DC 30:** It's also where every vampire in the city lives.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



A Stab of Fear: The London Monster

*"The frightened Ladies tremble, run and shriek;
But Ah! In vain they fly! In vain protection seek!
For he can run so swift, such diff'rent forms assume;
In vain to take him, must the Men presume.
This Monster then, who treats you so uncivil,
This Cutting Monster . . . is the Devil!"*
-- from the anonymous 1790 print *The Monster Detected!*

In the reign of Mad King George, the energies of his capital, and the calm of his populace, were upset by a Monster stalking the streets of Soho and the West End. Although he did not kill, he gained power from fear -- perhaps power enough to propel him down the spiral of time and into a bloody vastation a century later. Hear him, as the bard says, howling 'round your kitchen door? Better not let him in.

"It is an unpleasant task to call your minds to a scene so new in the annals of mankind; a scene so unaccountable: a scene so unnatural . . . that it could not have been believed ever to have existed, unless it had been demonstrated by that proof which the senses cannot resist . . . Indeed this case affords a melancholy lesson to our nature, and teaches us not to be too confident of the impossibility of any event, on the principle of its appearing to us to be out of nature . . ."
-- Proceedings of the Old Bailey, Jul. 8, 1790

Beginning in March of 1788, respectable women of London (and their servants, and perhaps no few less respectable filles-de-joie) found themselves increasingly beset by a strange pattern of attacks. A strange man would approach the lady, accost her in vulgar language, and then bump or jostle her rudely. This was bad enough, but the fiend also cut or stabbed his fair victim, usually in the thigh or buttocks when she turned away from him to flee or end the confrontation. (Occasionally, she would only discover her injuries upon returning home, or her skirts and crinolines would absorb the worst of the damage.) This attacker became known in the public prints as "the Monster," and as more attacks occurred, and more respectable husbands and brothers compared notes, the Monster's rampage became a city-wide scandal.

By April of 1790, at least thirty Monster attacks could be compiled by Lloyd's insurance broker John Julius Angerstein in a lengthy investigation. On April 15, he offered a reward of 100 pounds for the capture of the Monster, which had the effect of blowing the affair still wider. Posters, political cartoons, plays, songs, and broadsheets now trumpeted the Monster's crimes to all and sundry. The swells of Oxford Street banded together in a "No Monster Club," wearing badges to assure the young ladies they encountered of their merely conventionally predatory appetites. And the Monster's attacks continued: at least 20 more outrages surfaced over the three months following Angerstein's announcement. The Monster's methods varied as well: he now attacked the elderly and the indigent, along with the fashionable and beautiful; he concealed his blade in a nosegay and slashed at serving-girls' faces; he slashed at hair and struck girls on the head. Questions were asked in Parliament; something had to be done.

"This singular case excited universal attention; but many were by no means convinced of his guilt, believing that the witnesses, a circumstance which we have shewn too frequently to have happened, mistook the person of the prisoner. The particulars we have given of this brutal attack on the defenceless, by a monster of the stronger sex, with our full report of the trial, will sufficiently prepare our readers to judge for themselves on the case of Renwick Williams, divested of the popular prejudice then strong against him."
-- from the *Newgate Calendar*, Vol. IV

And indeed it was. By great good fortune, one of the Monster's earlier victims, Miss Anne Porter, spotted her assailant in a crowd in St. James's Park. After a comical pursuit, the man willingly returned with Miss Porter's companion, who promptly turned him over to the Bow Street Runners. Rather than the ogre of popular imagination, the suspect, Rhynewick (or Renwick) Williams was a slender, handsome maker of artificial flowers and good address (he had apprenticed to a dancing-master). Nonetheless, the Porter girls insisted on the identification, and Williams was bound over for trial. Unfortunately, under English law at the time, assault on a person was a mere misdemeanor, which would

not do for the feared Monster, so he was tried under a law of George I that made it a felony to intentionally cut or despoil a piece of clothing. Despite a witnessed alibi for the evening of the Porter attack, a jury found Williams guilty. But an eventual judicial review decided that he had not intended to cut the clothing, but rather to assault the women inside the clothing. There was nothing for it but a second trial, this time on a misdemeanor charge of attempted murder. Despite (or perhaps because of) the aggressive cross-examination and courtroom theatrics of Williams' new lawyer, the Irish duelist and eccentric Theophilus Swift, Williams was again found guilty, and sentenced to six years in Newgate Prison.

"Although no case quite captured the mania surrounding the London Monster, the Monster had several heirs."

-- Jan Bondeson, *The London Monster*

In his indispensable book on the case, *The London Monster*, author Jan Bondeson makes the most of the contradictory testimony of the Porter girls and their companion, and of Williams' alibi. He notes that even Angerstein believed, based on the widely varying eyewitness descriptions, that there were "SEVERAL of these *unnatural wretches*, these inhuman MONSTERS . . ." But Bondeson can't shake the uncomfortable fact that with Williams' imprisonment, the Monster's rampages ended. "His trial could be likened to an exorcism," in Bondeson's neat phrase, "once Williams was committed to Newgate, the Monster attacks ceased." But something had been born from the Monster's outrages. Serial stabbings of women broke out in Paris in 1819, Augsburg in 1819 (lasting until 1837!), Innsbruck in 1828, London again in 1834, Strasbourg in 1880, Northampton in 1885, Mainz in 1890, Brooklyn in 1891, Paris in 1895, Kiel in 1901, Hamburg in 1904, Chicago and St. Louis in 1906, Bridgeport (Conn.) in 1925, Bogota in 1931, and London a final time in 1977.

"Panic on the streets of London

Panic on the streets of Birmingham

I wonder to myself

Could life ever be sane again?"

-- The Smiths, "Panic"

As the Monster spawns one lineage, he partakes of another. The furor surrounding the London Monster compels comparison with such London frenzies as that caused by our old friend [Spring-Heeled Jack](#) in the 1830s. Other outbreaks of London's urban madness include the Mohock paranoia of 1712 and the garrotter scares of 1856 and 1862. The aristocratic Mohocks (who took their name from the savages of America) stabbed their inferiors, insulted women, and assaulted elderly watchmen; the garrotters simply strangled their respectable male victims while emptying their pockets. Further afield from the Monster's stomping grounds, but eerily similar in all other ways, the Halifax Slasher reportedly committed dozens of knife assaults on women in Halifax, England in 1938, and a "razor slasher" likewise terrorized Taipei in 1956. A "monkey-man" resembling a hirsute Spring-Heeled Jack similarly sliced his way across New Delhi in 2001, racking up 70 outrages in just a few months. Although killjoy sociologists and historians of crime maintain that none of these cases (unlike the London Monster) actually involved any provable assaults, putting them down to mere "mass hysteria" explains neither the very real panic nor the specific nature of its appearance in time and space.

"The recent series of enormities which have excited such horror must in all probability be due to some distorted or monomaniacal appetite which has grown by what it fed on . . . [T]here are recorded instances of cases nearly analogous. Just ninety-eight years ago there was a general panic all over London, caused by the atrocious doings of a mysterious person, who came to be generally known as 'the Monster.' . . . It will be noted what a similarity there is in this case and that of the Whitechapel assassin. The victims of 'the Monster' were women, and he seems by preference to have attempted something like the mutilations described in the newspapers. The monster of our day is evidently a wretch with demoniac and homicidal propensities, which have been stimulated by notoriety and discussion . . ."

-- from the *St. James's Budget*, Oct. 6, 1888

And of course, the other great pattern to emerge from London panic and mysterious stabbing attacks began in August of 1888, almost exactly a century after the Monster's. [Jack the Ripper](#) carved his own, far bloodier, swath through London's grim East End rather than the Monster's fashionable West End haunts, preying on desperate prostitutes rather than coquettish demimondaines. However, in the lurid glow of the Ripper, the Monster's traces are visible. For example, on February 25, 1888, one Annie Millwood reported an unknown assailant who stabbed her repeatedly in the legs and buttocks -- she died, of an unrelated pulmonary embolism, the next month. Scotland Yard briefly suspected

the 1880 Strasbourg stabber of being the Ripper, and in 1891 the London *Sun* trumpeted a buttock-stabbing maniac named Thomas Cutbush as the Ripper, noting that he had lived in Whitechapel in 1888. Scotland Yard dismissed the paper's argument, not least perhaps because Cutbush's uncle was a Scotland Yard police superintendent. Cutbush was quietly institutionalized, and London moved on.

"Fourth dimensional patterns within Eternity's monolith would, he suggests, seem merely random events to third dimensional percipients, events rising towards inevitable convergence like an archway's lines. Let us say something peculiar happens in 1788. A century later, related events take place. Then again, 50 years later . . . then 25 years . . . then 12-1/2. An invisible curve, rising through the centuries."

-- James Hinton, in *From Hell* by Alan Moore

And so, perhaps, did the Monster, transferring his attentions northward to Halifax fifty years later. Peter Sutcliffe, the "Yorkshire Ripper," attacked two women in Halifax during his five-year career, which began in August of 1975, 37 years after the Halifax Slasher vanished. In *From Hell*, Alan Moore points out the geometric regression of dates involved: 100 years from the Monster to the Ripper, 50 years from the Ripper to the Halifax Slasher, 25 years to the Yorkshire Moors Murders, 12.5 to the Yorkshire Ripper, and so forth. The scarlet thread spun by the Monster winds through this spiral of space and time, folded over and in upon itself like the petals of a flower -- like, for example, those artificial flowers made by Renwick Williams in Dover Street during the Monster's attacks, and carried by the Monster in six of his outrages.

Thirty of the Monster's attacks occurred within mere blocks of Williams' lodgings or flower shop, despite his alibis. Seven witnesses identified him, but like those of Jack the Ripper, eyewitness descriptions of the London Monster varied dramatically. The Monster was described as "invisible," as a shapeshifter, a demon, or a ghost. The libertine *Rambler's Magazine* tellingly identified the Monster's sexual perversion with that of "him who, in his amours, imitates the canine [howl](#), and gnaws the dirty bones rejected by his fair one." Likewise, the New Delhi "monkey-man" became a full-blown "werewolf" in reports from Assam by May of 2001. Intriguingly, the German naturalist Georg Foster (visiting London in 1790) described the Monsters as "tigers lusting for the blood of women," an interesting connection to our shapeshifting [manticores](#), and to the "tiger character" of the [Ratcliffe Highway](#) murderer. Note the coincidence - those crimes were also pinned on a seemingly inoffensive man named Williams whose [scapegoat](#) punishment nonetheless ended the rampage.

While we're on the topic of coincidences, those ultraterrestrial spoor par excellence, here's one to go out on. In the 1935 film *Werewolf of London*, actor Clark Williams plays Hugh Renwick, the curiously hapless and ineffectual companion to the titular werewolf. Thus Renwick (Williams) serves as a kind of midwife to a shapeshifting Monster, a predator of women impelled, as it happens, by a mysterious flower that can cure lycanthropy. Or, in good Paracelsan fashion, no doubt, cause it? Have [Augustin Le Prince's](#) cinema lenses, themselves connected to the Yorkshire Ripper's haunts, shown us a glimpse of the Monster's true form? Was the Monster a werewolf [tulpa](#), or a London egregore like [Mother Gin](#), unfolded from a silk flower and set free on the streets of London to "grow by what it fed on"? It fed on panic, and then on blood, and as the spiral wound tighter, on death. Look for yourself, but watch your . . . back.

Pyramid Review

Shardsfall Quest (*for DragonMech*)

Published by [Goodman Games](#)

Written by Joseph Goodman

Cover by Niklas Janssen

Illustrated by Jeff Carlisle

Cartography by Sean Glenn

72-Page Perfect Bound Softback; \$15.99

The first release for Goodman Games' *d20 System* setting [DragonMech](#) is the adventure *Shardsfall Quest*. Written for a party of four to six characters, it is designed to serve as the perfect introduction to the world of Highpoint, apocalyptically scoured by the abrasive Lunar Rain and rampaged across by the alien Lunar Dragons. Most of the population has retreated underground, or found sanctuary in the new mobile nations -- the mechdoms -- built around the 1,000 foot tall, steam driven, iron or stone clad City-Mechs. Each of these states projects its power through the mechs it carries in its legs. Carrying only a crew of three or four, these much smaller mechs, when working in concert, are capable of taking down a Lunar Dragon. A Mech Jockey character is not necessary to play, though one character needs to have the Mech Pilot skill. Other suggested characters are a fighter, a coglayer or steam-borg, and an arcane spellcaster.

[SPOILER WARNING!]

As the adventure opens, the PCs are assumed to be already together, perhaps as ore hunters, refugees, or as employees of the Dwarven-run Gearwrights Guild. Taking shelter from the night's Lunar Rain, the party's rest is disrupted by the impact of a large meteorite. Its size suggests that it is worth investigating, a potential source of lunar ore or of artifacts of the Lunar civilization. This is an opportunity for the characters to see more of the Lunar society than they would cowering from the swooping attacks of the Lunar Dragons. Inside the split in half meteorite they find a still occupied Lunar temple, which houses a curious object, the "Starshard."

Upon exiting the ruined temple, the party is confronted by a pair of combat mechs also sent to investigate the meteorite, in particular, for signs of Lunar activity. They are from the City-Mech of Nedderpik, a member of the Dwarf dominated Stenian Confederacy, and have both a problem and a proposition for the party. The meteorite containing the temple is actually part of a larger one, which landed in what is Legion territory. Naturally, the Stenian Confederacy cannot send its combat mechs charging off into the territory held by the xenophobic, human-dominated Legion, at least not without provoking further conflict. The characters of course, can, and are offered the use of a cargo mech to get them there faster. In return for investigating the second meteorite and clearing it of Lunar influence, the characters are offered the safety of citizenship aboard the Nedderpik.

After a diversion deep inside the cog forest of the Nedderpik, the party sets out for the lands of Legion, aboard a Magwagon, an old freight mech. Locating the second half of the meteorite and the rest of the Lunar Temple is the easy part, but getting inside it is another matter. One of the Legion's many tribes is encamped at its foot, and the party will have to employ either diplomatic or covert means to gain access. Either option involves more roleplaying and

investigation than in the adventure's earlier encounters. Once inside it is clear that the temple is still operating, but besides this, the party will discover a more surprising item: a second Starshard. Yet before it is theirs to grasp, it is snatched away by an exceptionally quick and bird-like combat mech. Pursuit of the fleeing mech leads the Magwagon into the arms of another nation, the Irontooth Clans. In order to survive this encounter, the party must participate in a jousting duel against the clan's warriors. Unfortunately, in just a cargo mech, and against pilots noted for their prowess or mech-fu, the players really have very little chance!

Ultimately, it is how the party performs that matters, rather than if they win. If they can gain the trust and friendship of the clans, they will be told more about the two Starshards they have found so far, and there is at least one more to be found. This is where the adventure ends, bar returning the loaned mech to Nedderpik and gaining citizenship aboard the city-mech. There is not a rousing climax or finale here, and the adventure feels very much the first part of an ongoing series. Also included at the back of the book is small selection of new feats, spells, and creatures as well as two new mechs.

There is very little in ***Shardsfall Quest*** to gain in terms of material reward, but they come in other ways. Most obviously is enough experience points to take the characters from first to third level. In-game reward takes the form of encounters with various aspects of the setting, the chance to make contacts along the way, to learn more of the threat represented by the Lunar society, and of course, to gain a place in society. And in the Starshards, the items of the scenario's title a little ancient history and suggestions as to further quests.

[END SPOILER WARNING]

The book is decently put together, although it lacks the polish of the setting's core book. The artwork is clearer, though many pieces are more cartoon-like. The cartography, however, is nicely done, having just the right degree of roughness to them. A final touch is the inclusion of the designer's notes, which -- while enjoyable enough to read -- are not as useful or informative as those in the core book.

The adventure does feel a little reminiscent of the [Doomstones](#) campaign for ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*** in its hunt for bright, shiny, magically connected objects. But then the grim and perilous nature ***DragonMech*** is very different in feel, and anyway, the focuses of ***Shardsfall Quest*** are less likely to turn on the players. Admittedly, this is a linear adventure, but that is in the nature of quests. And really, ***Shardsfall Quest*** does exactly what it sets to do -- introduce the players to various aspects of the ***DragonMech*** setting. These are its above ground aspects, so it still leaves a lot of the setting to be explored.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Anachronism

Published by [TriKing Games](#)

Created by Michael Brown, Karen Brown, Dennis Lackey, Dan Tibbles, Justin Walsh, Shteevie McLaughlin, Charlie Oglesby, Kai Nesbit, John Burgess, Tyler Mays, Tony Burian, Luke Peterschmidt, Ryan Dancey, Ian Ryan, Ryan Miller, Richard Goodwin, Danny Walker, Jeremy Holcomb, Jessie Brock, Daniel Carew, & Chris Porowski

Sepia-toned playmat, 10 full-color cards, two six-sided dice, \$12.95; warrior packs, \$6.95

Someone at The History Channel must be a gamer. TriKing Games has some sort of cross-marketing deal going with them, and together they have produced *Anachronism*, the sort of game that drives many a bar bet among gamers, historians, and time travel aficionados. The idea: Major figures of military history and legend hop into an arena, mano a mano, to see who's "da man."

The object of the game is to kill your opponent or, barring that, be the healthiest man alive when the fight is over.

Each player gets a set of five cards, either Achilles or Spartacus if you're playing with just the two-player starter set. One card is the warrior card, showing the hero, his statistics, and any special abilities he has. The others are called support cards and show equipment and circumstances the fighter can make use of as the game progresses.

There is no rulebook; rather, the rules of play are included on the playmat (convenient during the game, but you won't be brushing up on these on the bus). This is also the "board" upon which the game is played. The warriors are set in their starting row in the four-by-four square arena. The four support cards are placed in numbered slots along the edges in whatever order the player thinks he'll need them.

The game has five rounds, and players get one turn each per round. These turns are further subdivided into actions. Each round, both players turn the card from slot one face up -- initiative scores thereon indicate who gets to go first. The active warrior uses his action allowance to move or to attack his opponent. The combatant has values like experience (to settle ties), elements (what card effects he can make use of), and statistics (how much damage he can take or do). The most important consideration is whether the warrior can attack into his opponent's square. A small grid shows where the fighter can attack -- you can't attack into a square with no number. This means some foes are harder to outflank, and it makes it worth your while to maneuver to remain out of your enemy's reach or to improve your chance to hit.

These numbers start poor since you're just entering the arena. As revealed cards provide gear, you'll end up with special weapons that do more damage, have special effects, or change or improve which squares you can threaten (weapons have their own grid, typically with better scores). Players battle by rolling two dice each, modified by the grids' numbers and anything else on the cards; normally only the attacker does damage, while success for the defender means another round of breathing. Even if you cannot kill the other warrior in five rounds, you win if you have more life left.

Most of the pictures are painted, with several good illustrations and a couple with characters that come off looking stiffer than the cards. They're printed on good, firm stock (they're closer to tiles than cards), and most look to be foiled

-- a bright, reflective surface that, thankfully, is applied only to the trim so you can read important text. Achilles has a silver finish, Spartacus a gold one. The playmat is about 25.5" by 30", and while it's also nice material with an evocative sepia finish, it's another of those mats that's going to take some flattening out. At least here you have only cards to lay on it and not something top-heavy like figurines, but one of those clear plastic sheets used in miniatures gaming will help "train" it.

More warrior packs (and promotionals) are out as well. Anyone concerned that the whole thing is too over-the-top should set aside those reservations. The cross-time pollination is played down -- fighters are just here for the donnybrook -- though semi-mythical folks like Achilles can count on equipment and rerolls from the divine. Play of the game is simple, and the grid mechanics are clever things that give a better sense of the give-and-take between two opponents who have their own peculiar limitations and blind spots.

For some, the game won't be entirely satisfying. The game is extravagant enough to include a pair of six-sided dice, but not so much as to include the two pairs you're supposed to use (players roll simultaneously; if one alters a die roll he needs to know or recall the other guy's results). The level of abstraction means you may never quite think of **Anachronism** as a miniatures *or* card game. Things only go five rounds, which makes for a quick game (or several of them, if you want best of three), and while there's plenty of strategy, the experience feels somewhat constraining. Still, it hits where it counts, it's less expensive than a CCG, and the warrior variety should keep the arguments fresh, if not the game.

--Andy Vetromile

Adventure Locale, Complete with Hot and Cold Running Plots

It's rare that I discuss an article that's appearing this week . . . or, really, discuss or reference any articles directly. Of course, it's also rare that I wake up in a puddle of my own vomit in a strange city with some woman's name tattooed on my thigh who I don't even know, so let's think outside the box a bit this week.

Anyway, this week's issue features Owen K.C. Stephen's "Tudor's Guide to Angel's Harbor." In it, one location -- the city itself -- is given an in-depth description, complete with lots of secrets and subplots that can be sprung at any time. In addition, there are secrets the PCs can discover if they take time investigating and make successful "find information" rolls. The existence of these rolls would, I think, encourage players to investigate everything, just to see if the players get lucky with their skill checks. (This is a variation of the old "If it has stats, it can be killed" truism.)

Also this past week, I watched the movie *Saw*, a thriller-horror movie about two guys who wake up chained to opposite sides of a large, filthy bathroom; shortly thereafter they discover tapes that indicate the only way they're going to "win the game" (and, coincidentally, stay alive) is to kill the person chained to the opposite side within a few hours. Yes, the victims have been chained there by a serial killer of the movie variety, who seem to have unlimited resources, spare time, creativity, and steady cams. Like all the times I've spent two hours chained to a bathroom (and one other time I tried eating burritos with a cup of drawn butter for dipping), much of the action of this movie takes place within the bathroom itself.

Finally the week before last I saw the first season of the HBO series *Deadwood*, a series that has reinvented the Western by inserting a curse every 14 words. It takes place entirely in the tiny town of Deadwood -- from which the series name might have sprung -- and it focuses on the intrigues and stories of these people forced to deal with each other and a near-inscrutable Calamity Jane.

This week's article, *Saw*, and *Deadwood* have something in common: They both get a lot of mileage out of one location, with built-in secrets, things to discover, and other bits that keep PCs entertained.

And thus the gist of this week's article is that, if all the action is going to take place in one spot, it's important to have lots of ready-to-go secrets and clues in the wings . . . and it's important to have a plan for how you're going to deal with them.

Let's fabricate a real-world example. We've got a campaign where the PCs are going to be characters aboard a turn-of-the-century cruise ship. The campaign will take place entirely (or at least almost entirely) aboard this vessel. Although it's a somewhat "straight" historical campaign -- no cyberwear, minimum catgirls -- the GM still intends to take full advantage of the era. So one adventure might take place with pre-War espionage and intrigues, another might have Cthulhu-esque occultism, while a third might have very minor steampunk trappings.

Okay; so the GM sets up a bunch of encounters and future seeds, designed ahead of time so that he can drop hints. ("Okay; this room has a dead, mummified body hidden beneath it, so whenever people go to this section of the ship, they might get a whiff of an odd aroma every so often. This cabin's special glowing stars were painted with radioactive material, which might affect future steampunk adventures, and could also have effects if anyone ever spends too much time in there. This one . . .") In one room, the GM determines that a Cthulhu-esque Aramaic Illustrated edition of *Big Book of Things Man Wasn't Meant to Know (But Weren't Afraid to Ask)* was left hidden in the floorboards. The GM plans to have one long-term guest discover it after a dozen or so adventures, and this person would eventually grow in power to become a major threat.

The problem is, after a few adventures, the players get wind that all these plot seeds are already led. (This isn't necessarily the result of players trying to short-circuit future adventure. Rather, it could stem from them playing their characters correctly; after all, if you're in charge of security aboard a ship, and someone finds an ancient dagger and causes mayhem with it, you'd be remiss in your duties if you didn't do a stem-to-stern inspection of the ship.) How do

you resolve this?

Well, first remember that the PCs have limited time -- they have full-time jobs, and if they spend a lot of them doing a search then they won't have a lot of time left for other things, and other responsibilities might fall through the cracks (leading to future plot possibilities). Also, remember that most limited locations are going to be *big* (with possible exceptions such as *Saw*); doing a full search of every secret -- and full interrogations of all citizens or residents, if appropriate -- is going to take time. It's a mistake to see an article such as Owen's -- which can be read in 20 minutes or less -- and think that such an investigation can take place in that amount of time. In fact, an article such as Owen's makes one realize that there are many mundane things to check which *don't* have interesting secrets associated with them . . . and they require the same amount of investigation as other, more interesting conundrums.

Finally, it's important to note that it's okay if players "short-circuit" some aspects of future adventures. If nothing else, it makes them feel like they are an active and vital part of the setting, which is what most gaming groups want. If it's important for a story for the PCs not to be successful (or entirely successful), then maybe the GM can steer the adventure back on track at some point. For example, say the PCs find the Nasty Secrets book hinted at above. Well, if they keep it aboard the ship somewhere (remember that their opportunities for leaving the ship are limited), then maybe someone will find and/or steal it. Heck, maybe the book *compels* someone to steal it. Done incorrectly, the players might feel cheated: "Aw, man; we try to be proactive and the GM railroads us regardless." But done correctly, and with understanding players, it can seem quite cool: "All *right!* We've obviously stumbled onto something big, otherwise why would people want it so much?"

I've long been a fan of "[ship in a bottle](#)" adventures, because it keeps players focused and gives them reason to become involved with the setting. The same applies for campaigns in a bottle (as opposed to "Campaigns in a Box" . . . that's someone else's bailiwick). It's not without problems and potential pitfalls, but it can be really rewarding.

Much more rewarding than, say, trying to understand this book I found buried in my backyard. I mean, who can understand this stuff? "Klaatu barada nikt . . ." <zot>

--Steven Marsh

Object Lessons (Part III)

An Enchanted Collection for *Call of Cthulhu* d20

by Nicholas Luna

*Editor's Note: The first part of this article of assorted items and artifacts for **Call of Cthulhu** d20 appeared [three weeks ago](#) and the second installment appeared [two weeks ago](#). This is the final chapter. It ends now.*

Rasputin's Cross

Public Information

This large golden cross is very old, perhaps dating to the 7th or 8th century, and once belonged to the famous monk Rasputin. After the monk's death, the cross made it to America in the possession of Yuri Sladovich, a Russian who immigrated in 1925. Within three years of arriving in America, Sladovich built a successful criminal organization. As criminals are prone to do, Sladovich died violently late in 1928. The cross disappeared after Sladovich's death, until 1941, when it resurfaced in the possession of Rutherford Carson, a cult leader in the western United States. Carson, and all but one member of his cult, died in a violent confrontation with Federal authorities. In 1942, the cross came into the possession of Daniel Mitchell. In 1954, Mitchell's wife fatally poisoned him. The cross disappeared after that incident.

The cross is a beautiful work of art, six inches long, with fine, detailed engravings of biblical scenes. Each point of the cross is set with a small ruby. The cross is heavy, and set with a loop for a chain, but the original chain is long missing.

GM Information

A hermit monk created the cross in 674 A.D. The monk had turned from the Church and been driven insane by many mystical experiences. The monk's insanity manifested as a burning hatred of the Church and all that was good. Determined to bring down the established faith, the monk turned to dark magic. He created this cross, and many other items, all designed to corrupt and destroy followers of the Christian faith.

The cross, when worn as an amulet, provides the character with a +6 enhancement bonus to Charisma. There is a condition for this bonus however -- to maintain the bonus, the character must appear as a humble peasant or commoner (lowest social class) of the appropriate era. If the character's appearance makes him seem above this station, he does not gain the bonus. For example, Rasputin always maintained an unwashed, ragged appearance even though he was an advisor to the Tsar and Tsarina, and lived a high-class lifestyle. Another effect of the cross is envy. Eventually (within a few years), others will become jealous of the character, and will plot his downfall. The only way to circumvent this aspect of the cross is to avoid staying in one location for long periods.

In addition to the presence-enhancing properties of the cross, it makes the character more resistant to damage. When wearing the cross, an attack must inflict 20 points of damage to require a massive damage Fortitude saving throw. As with the Charisma bonus, to access this power, the character must maintain an appearance as a member of the lowest social class for the era.

Weight: 2/3 lb.; Study Time: 2d6 days.

Adventure Ideas

The PCs become aware of a cult (perhaps they hear rumors over time during the campaign) led by an enigmatic leader who holds complete dominion over his subjects. The cult is involved in minor robberies, kidnappings, and occasionally, murder. The cult leader possesses the amulet, and the PCs' must avoid falling victim to his cult of personality while ending his reign.

Roman Sword

Public Information

This roman sword, or Gladius, from the 1st century A.D., was found in an archaeological site in Africa in 1960. There is nothing particularly unusual about the weapon aside from its fine condition and a faded engraving on the blade. The sword was found with a few pieces of armor.

The sword is two feet long, and weighs three pounds. The engraving on the blade is in Latin and reads "One day home." The weapon is in incredible condition for its age. In the pommel is an indentation that looks as though it may have once contained a gem, but this is long missing.

GM Information

This sword once belonged to Claudius Flavus, a Roman soldier of some skill and reputation. In 39 A.D., the ship he was on encountered a terribly violent storm. The storm destroyed the ship, and killed everyone on board, save Claudius. He awoke to find himself in a strange land; a land of cold, harsh climes, and primitive, grim, black-haired people. These people reminded him of the Germanic tribes with which he had some familiarity. Although it took time, Claudius bonded with these fierce people, proving himself in combat against enemy tribes that attempted to raid the lands of his newfound companions. Eventually, one of the tribes "adopted" him and he found a home.

Through many battles, he learned to generate the berserker fury that provided the warriors with untold might. He carved "One day home" in the blade of his sword to remind himself of his continuing desire to return home. One day, when out on a ship, a storm, similar to the one that deposited him in the strange new land, erupted with great fury, and as if a repeat of history, the storm destroyed his ship. He awoke to find himself in Africa; unfortunately, his wounds from the storm and wreck were too severe, and he died shortly after realizing where he had landed. Some aspect of his spirit remained trapped in the weapon, with the goals of killing and returning home. Claudius tapped into a dark force when he learned the berserker fury. If the sword returns to Italy, and is buried and consecrated, Claudius's spirit will rest at last, and the sword will lose its powers...

When a character draws blood with this weapon, he must roll a Will save against DC 24. If successful, the save must be checked again the next time he draws blood. If the saving throw fails, the character flies into a berserk rage, attacking the nearest living creatures. While in this rage, his Strength and Constitution both increase by +6 each (the Constitution increase provides +3 hit points per level), while his Intelligence and Wisdom both decrease by -6. He suffers a -2 penalty to Armor Class. These modifiers disappear when the fury ends, and the loss of the increased hit points may result in death.

While the character is in the grip of the fury, he cannot use any skills, feats, or other abilities that require concentration. This rage lasts for a number of rounds equal to (newly modified) Constitution modifier +3d6. After the rage ends, the character is exhausted for 3d6 minutes.

During the rage, the character's perceptions are altered; people become evil creatures; animals become evil creatures; cars become evil creatures. This altered perception causes him to lose 1d8 Sanity the first time he enters a rage, and one point every additional time he enters it.

Weight: 3 lbs.; Study Time: 1d4 days.

Damage: 1d6; Critical: 18-20/x2; Size: Small; Type: Slashing; provides a +1 enhancement bonus to attack and damage rolls.

Adventure Ideas

- The PCs are hired to recover the sword after it has been stolen from a friend's (or organization's) collection. When the sword is found, a fight ensues, and (optimally) one of the heroes will have to use it to defend himself and his companions.
- Someone known to the investigators has been arrested for a gruesome attack, performed with the sword. The PCs must find a way to prove that the person was not responsible for his actions.

Scepter of Luciano

Public Information

The Scepter of Luciano is a minor relic from a dark time in history. It belonged to one of the more successful, if lesser known, Inquisitors during the Spanish Inquisition. Luciano garnered many confessions, but the minor mention of him in historical texts indicate that he did not use torture or any of the other common methods of the period. Luciano rarely resorted to tactics other than interrogation; his prisoners usually gave the anticipated confessions. Luciano's success earned him several enemies within the ranks of his comrades. At the time of his death, most observers presumed the cause to be natural; today, scholars believe he was poisoned. Officials buried the scepter with Luciano. The scepter reappeared shortly after World War II, turning up in a recovered horde of stolen Nazi treasure. Spain claimed the scepter, but before the Allies could return it, the scepter disappeared.

The Scepter of Luciano is a short staff, three feet in length, made from oak, and plated with a thin sheet of silver. The silver plating is engraved with scores of tiny crosses. It is topped with a six-inch silver crucifix. The crucifix is crafted with such detail that individual hairs are distinguishable.

GM Information

A hermit monk created the scepter of Luciano in 683 A.D. The monk had turned from Christ, and lost all faith in God. He suffered through certain experiences that eventually drove him insane. He created the scepter, and other items, believing it would be used to abuse the general populace and that this would aid in the deterioration of faith. The scepter passed through many hands, until Luciano found it and put it to "good" use.

The scepter allows a character to compel others to say what the target believes the character wants to hear. In Luciano's case, the subjects believed that Luciano wanted to hear confessions to heresy and other crimes, thus, the victims confessed.

To use this ability, the character must concentrate his thoughts on the target while speaking to him, asking the questions that he wants answered. After 10 minutes of this, the target must roll a Will save against a DC of 15 - the character's Charisma modifier. If the saving throw fails, the subject says the words the character wants to hear, at least to the best of his ability. If the saving throw is successful, the subject is not magically compelled to respond, and is immune to the scepter for 24 hours.

The character can make it hard to resist the power of the scepter by continuing to speak to the subject. For every additional 10 minutes, the saving throw DC increases by +1, with no maximum. The intention to speak for an extended period must be announced before the power is applied. The power of the scepter cannot be used over mediums such as telephones, radios, video transmissions, etc.

Weight: 5 lbs.; Study Time: 2d6 weeks.

Adventure Idea

A PC's curiosity is sparked when a dear friend confesses to a recent murder. Investigation reveals that the interrogating officer, nicknamed "Fix" (short for crucifix), possesses the scepter, and uses it in his work. He claims that it helps to focus the suspect's concentration.

Schutzstaffel (S.S.) Dagger

Public Information

This dagger originally belonged to an S.S. officer in the concentration camp at Auschwitz. An American G.I. brought the dagger home with him after the war. The dagger has appeared a few times in the past 50 years, typically in pawn shops across the country.

This is a classically styled Schutzstaffel Dagger, made by Böker Solingen, 14.5 inches long, with a black handle, SS marks beneath the pommel cap, and the Nazi eagle insignia. "*Meine Ehre Heisst Treue*" (My Honor is [called] Loyalty) is engraved on the blade. The sheath is black zinc, with simulated silver fittings. The chain from this dagger is missing. Other than the missing chain, the dagger is in superior condition.

GM Information

Otto Bitterich owned this dagger, and routinely used it in acts of torture and murder, particularly against homosexuals. Eventually, Bitterich realized that Germany would not win the war and he took his own life with the dagger. This final act of violence sealed the pain of his countless victims in the weapon, along with a trace of his own perverse evil.

This weapon contains the emotional and spiritual pain of dozens of Nazi victims. Simply handling it leaves most people with a general feeling of unease. If used to draw blood, the pain in the blade affects the character wielding the weapon. Every time the character draws the blood of a living creature with the dagger, he must roll a Will save against DC 28. If successful, he loses one point of Sanity. If the saving throw fails, the pain of this blade's victims bombards the character; he is overwhelmed with their pain, humiliation, and suffering. This results in a loss of 1d6 each Wisdom and Charisma (both temporary), and 1d8 Sanity. Even after the lost Wisdom and Charisma return, the character will have a desire to inflict pain, and a sense of superiority over others.

On a second failed save, the character loses 1d6 each Wisdom and Charisma. This loss is temporary, except for one point of each that is permanent. In addition, he loses 1d10 Sanity, and the urge to inflict pain and death becomes stronger.

If he fails the saving throw a third time, he temporarily loses 1d6 Wisdom (one point is permanent), and permanently loses 1d6 points of Charisma. He also loses 4d4 Sanity, and develops an obsession with torturing and killing those deemed undesirable by the Nazis, with a preference for homosexuals.

From this point on, for every victim the character kills, he will lose one point of Sanity, and for every two victims, he loses one point of Charisma permanently.

The only way to end this obsession is to use a *cast out devil* spell. The resisting force has a different bonus to save, based on how often the saving throw from using the dagger has failed.

- Once: +6
- Twice: +12
- Three times: +18
- Each additional two victims after the third failure: +1

If the force is cast out, the character loses all obsessions with hunting Jews and homosexuals, but he retains full memory of what he has done.

Damage: 1d4; Critical: 19-20/x2; Range Increment: 10 ft.; Weight: 1 lb.; Type: Piercing.

Weight: 1 lb.; Study Time: 1d3 days.

Adventure Ideas

- A PC in law enforcement has to solve the recent murders of several homosexuals and Jews. The deaths appear to be caused by a straight-edged steel weapon. His investigation leads him to a suspect who is totally unexpected.
- The characters are asked to investigate the theft of a potent magical dagger. The dagger was stolen from the owner, who knows of its properties, and the thief may be the type to use it.

Secret Agent Gary 12-inch Action Figure

Public Information

Secret Agent Gary was one of the most popular cartoons in the 1980s. Unsurprisingly, the popularity of the program resulted in a large line of toys, including action figures, lunch boxes, collectible cards, stickers, kites, and so forth. This is one of the few surviving examples of the original line of Secret Agent Gary 12-inch figures. The warehouse that stored the original lot of figures burned to the ground before the figures could be distributed. Only 12 of the original figures survived the fire, and several individuals have owned this particular figure.

Secret Agent Gary is 12 inches tall, has blond hair, blue eyes, and a tight-lipped, determined expression. It wears a black covert operations uniform, and comes with a dress tuxedo and black sunglasses (the figure originally included additional accessories, but these did not survive the fire). Gary also comes with a Walther PPK pistol. His articulated waist, knees, elbows, and other joints allow for a wide range of positions.

GM Information

Daryl Foster, a television executive and occultist, spawned the idea of Secret Agent Gary. Once he created the cartoon, and talks of a toy line began, the idea came to him -- he would mass-produce enchanted toys that could spy for him. While most homes wouldn't be worth spying on, Daryl figured that several of the figures would end up in affluent homes. With his toy spies, he would be able to "get some dirt," enabling him to blackmail the families. Unfortunately, for Daryl, a group of paranormal investigators discovered his plan, burned the warehouse that stored the figures, and killed him.

Activating Gary requires a specific ritual that a character can learn through divinations or with diligent research (Research check DC 28 or higher). Once the character performs the ritual on Gary, he can bring Gary to life at will, see through Gary's eyes, and hear what Gary hears. Gary follows the character's mental commands, and the character can control him over distances as far as 1,000 miles. Gary is alive, and has a distinct personality and desires, but remains subject to the character's commands. As long as the character treats him well, Gary will not attempt to subvert those commands. Gary's personality is like that of a movie spy, but geared for more action. Gary also has an evil streak.

The GM will have to decide how many of the original 12 remaining figures are left.

Weight: 1/3 lb.; Study Time: 1d6 weeks.

Secret Agent Gary: Diminutive Humanoid (Lesser Independent Race); **HD:** 1/4 d8+1; hp: 2; **Init:** +4 (Dex); **Spd:** 15 ft.; **AC** 20 (+4 size, +4 Dex, +2 natural armor); **Atk** +4 ranged (tiny Walther PPK 1 point); **Face/Reach:** 1 ft. x 1 ft./0 ft.; **SQ:** Immunities, skilled; **SV** Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +0; **Str** 1; **Dex** 20; **Con** 13; **Int** 7; **Wis** 10; **Cha** 11; **Height** 1 ft., **weight** 5 ounces.

Skills: Climb +8, Hide +20, Listen +4, Move Silently +8, Search +6, Spot +4

Feats: Dodge

Special Qualities: Immunities (Gary is immune to gases, energy drains, ability drain, and ability damage), Skilled (Gary has four times the number of skill points for a creature of his type).

Skills: Gary's Climb skill is modified by his Dex, not Str. He is particularly good at finding things, and has a +4 racial bonus to Search checks.

Possessions: Walther PPK (This is a tiny version of the handgun. It does not appear to have moving parts, but it does fire bolts of magical force. Damage 1; Critical: x2; Capacity: Infinite; Range: 2 ft.; Rate: Multifire).

Adventure Idea

One of the PCs begins to feel as if he is being watched. If he attempts to discover his observers, eventually he finds Gary. The character will have to discover the secret of Secret Agent Gary and determine who is spying on him and why. Gary may or may not reveal information about his master, depending on how he has been treated by the master.

Skull of Pierre Market

Public Information

In 19th-century France, there existed a small cult of Satanists, led by Pierre Market. A goldsmith by trade, Market was an intelligent, charismatic, evil man, who led his cult in many dark, forbidden rituals. Many of these rituals involved the use of opium, and some involved the sacrifice of living creatures (both animal and human). Although Market was a bright person, many of his followers lacked an equal intelligence, and one night, after a bout of drunken bragging, authorities apprehended and interrogated one of the cultists. The cultist broke easily and gave authorities the names and locations of his fellow cult members. Within a few days authorities apprehended Market and most of his followers.

Market was charged and convicted of numerous criminal charges, and sentenced to death by decapitation. One of Market's few followers, an apprentice who had avoided the authorities, stole Market's head. He stripped the flesh and muscle from the head, leaving just the skull. He then began to add layers of gold foil to the skull. Eventually, the gold permeated the skull, and rose-colored pieces of glass were added to the eye sockets, resulting in an unusual artifact. Presumably, the cultist kept the skull, and it has appeared briefly several times in the past. At some point in time, the jawbone was lost, destroyed, or stolen.

The skull appears to be a golden human skull, with rose-colored glass set in the eye sockets. The gold is thinner in some spots, from years of handling, but it is not bare in any spot. The skull lacks a jawbone.

GM Information

When the cultist began the project, he didn't realize that a fragment of Market's spirit remained in the skull. He intended the skull to be a monument to his fallen master and their Dark Lord, but Market's spirit fragment channeled energy from the entity that he worshipped (unknown to the cultists, the entity was not Satan) into the skull, providing it with the ability to provide knowledge and power when properly fed. The skull channels the dark feelings and thoughts of the user to the entity that Market and his cultists worshipped. Once this entity is fed enough dark thoughts and emotions, he will be able to manifest in the world, and he is almost full.

The Skull acts as a teacher of occult knowledge. To use the skull properly, a human jawbone must be attached to it. To use the skull, a character must feed it. Initially, a character must feed it a finger from a living human being. The skull will then teach one spell. To use it again, the skull must be fed a full hand from a living human being. It will

then teach another spell. Then it must be fed an arm, a lung, a heart, and a brain. A new spell is learned each time. After teaching six spells, the skull will cease to function for that character.

Weight: 3 lbs.; Study Time: 1d4 weeks.

Adventure Ideas

- A PC antiquarian comes into possession of the golden jawbone, and someone wants it to complete the skull. The person who wants the jawbone may use money, or he may use force to acquire it.
- A PC, or acquaintance, is abducted by someone who possesses the skull. The abductor intends to feed the hero to the skull in return for the skull's power. . The hero must escape. Perhaps he will take the skull with him when he does.

Slave Tag

Public Information

This is a finely preserved copper tag, typical of the kind used to mark slaves in the United States during the 19th century. According to recovered inventories, the tag marked a man named Marcus Jackson. Jackson family history tells that Marcus eventually escaped his master and made his way north. The tag remained in the family as an heirloom. Recently, Eliza Jackson, a sixth generation Jackson, sold the tag.

The tag is a diamond-shaped piece of copper, one and a half inches across, worn smooth through the years, but still in remarkable condition. The engravings on the tag include the slave's number -- 1909; position -- servant; and the year of issue -- 1853. The upper tip has a hole drilled in it for the placement of a leather thong or strap.

GM Information

Marcus Jackson had been a rebellious slave, whose defiance resulted in frequent, often near fatal whippings and beatings. Even after Marcus escaped his master's grip, he could not find peace, and he wandered, moving from place to place frequently. Eventually, he did settle down and start a family, but his spirit never found tranquility. When he died, his essence became trapped in the tag that Marcus had never removed. This spiritual essence imbued the tag with supernatural properties.

When this tag is worn, it creates a feedback loop between the wearer and those who inflict damage upon him. Whenever the wearer is attacked and suffers physical damage, the attacker suffers from flashes of horrible inhuman images. The attacker must roll a Will saving throw against DC 18 or be stunned for one round. Also, if the saving throw fails, both the character and the attacker must roll Sanity checks (0/1). Even if the saving throw is successful, the attacker will have to roll again should he score another successful hit.

The tag does not begin to work immediately upon donning. It must be worn for one full day before its powers come into play, and if removed, the power is lost temporarily. If the tag is taken off, the character must wear it for one full day, without its protection, per hour that he did not wear it before it can reestablish the feedback loop again.

While the tag is worn, the character finds himself plagued by disturbing dreams, all centered on slavery. Usually he is the slave, suffering the punishments of a rebellious individual, but sometimes, he is the master, experiencing the thoughts and feelings incurred while whipping his property. These dreams are disturbing, and require the character to sleep for an additional two hours per night to actually receive the benefits of a good night's sleep. These dreams also require a Sanity check (0/1).

Weight: Negligible; Study Time: 2d6 days

Adventure Idea

James Walker, a young African-American activist recently came into possession of the tag. During a rally for reparations, he was beaten by a white riot cop. The cop was committed after the incident, apparently insane (his Sanity was already dangerously low). James believes he has gained some type of "righteous" power, perhaps from God, and has started instigating fights with police officers and other authority figures, in order to test his newfound ability. The PCs, either by virtue of knowing Walker or knowing someone who knows him, are asked to investigate the recent change in his behavior. Perhaps, someone believes he is possessed, and they must determine if this is the case.

Tom Harris Typewriter

Public Information

This typewriter originally belonged to the popular pulp author Tom Harris. Harris was actually a woman named Jennifer Reeves. Although Reeves' most popular character was the hard-fisted, good-hearted private investigator Clancy Jones, she wrote many other stories between 1931 and 1939, including fantasy, horror, and science fiction, all on this typewriter. On the night of October 30, 1939, Jennifer Reeves died in her New York home, a victim of a tragic, violent murder. Although stabbed numerous times, the authorities determined that the killing blow had been to her head, struck with the typewriter. Her murder is still unsolved and remains a popular subject among fans and amateur investigators.

The Harris typewriter is a LC Smith and Corona SC-P010 portable typewriter. The case is maroon with a few scratches, and a large dent in the front right corner. On the front of the typewriter, just below the key bank, is a strip of brass, with the engraving "There is no peace at the gate." The "N" and "P" keys stick.

GM Information

Jennifer Reeves was not human; she was one of the Serpent People. A talented sorcerer, she had a yearning to blend into human society, and in her attempts to do so, developed a fascination with human fiction, particularly detective stories. She tried to write a few stories, but she lacked talent and skill, and her first attempts suffered complete rejection. Jennifer set about enchanting a typewriter that could turn her printed babbling into fine fiction, and she succeeded. Her first story with the new typewriter, *Death in Crookmont*, was a success, as were the following stories. In 1939, a rogue government group killed Reeves in her home.

This typewriter allows a character to produce well crafted written works, even if she lacks any skill or talent. The device interprets the style that she is attempting, and prints a corrected version of what she types. For example, if the character types "ther wuz a bap smell ovur the towown that nite, but I ignored it, payin attenshun to my victim," it might print as "While trailing my quarry, I managed to ignore the foul stench that hung in the air like the smoke in the corner bar." The character must have a clear vision of what she is attempting to describe.

With the proper knowledge and skill, it is possible that more powers may be invoked with the typewriter.

Weight: 18 lbs.; Study Time: 2d6 days.

Adventure Idea

The characters' attention is brought to a recent best-selling series of books. These books talk about places and things "man was not meant to know," and if the PCs have had such experiences, they realize that the books must be stopped. The books are being written by a being that has the ultimate goal of awakening Cthulhu.

Water Clock

Public Information

Steven Van Ellan, an elderly and prominent businessman in the American Colonies, commissioned this water clock in 1774. Four years after he received the clock, Van Ellan and his entire family were killed in a fire. The clock remained unscathed. Plantation owner John Hamilton purchased the clock at an auction. The clock stayed with the Hamilton line until the Civil War, when Confederate General Robert Hampton claimed it as "spoils of war." The Hampton family retained the clock until 1930, when they sold it to account for debts owed. The clock has since passed through numerous hands.

This water clock stands seven feet in height, and is crafted from fine mahogany and oak, with gold inlays. The water vessels are made of silver, and hold six gallons of water, using one quart per hour. The clock face is gold, with silver inlays depicting children.

GM Information

This water clock was built by Karl Neumann, a clock smith of some repute. Neumann, in addition to being a clock smith, was also a dabbler in the occult. Steven Van Ellan discovered Neumann's occult background and came up with the idea for the clock. To persuade Neumann, Van Ellan threatened to reveal Neumann's heretical ways. Fearful for his life, Neumann agreed to build the clock, designed to turn back time.

Although a long process, Neumann was successful in the building and enchanting of the clock. After receiving the clock, Van Ellan, a murderous individual, had Neumann killed. Prepared for this outcome, Neumann uttered a spell with his dying breath that cursed the clock, triggering the requirement for the continual flow of blood to prevent unnatural aging. Shortly after Neumann's death, a sect of witch hunters killed Van Ellan and his family. The hunters knew nothing of the clock and left it.

This item functions properly as a typical water clock unless blood is used instead of water. When blood is used in the clock, the hands of the clock move backwards, reversing time for those near it. When blood is used in the clock, every hour marked by the clock reduces the physical age of every creature within 30 feet by seven days. If someone spent 24 hours in the presence of the clock, he would have his physical age reduced by 168 days (approximately five and a half months). This powerful magic allows those within range to regain more youthful forms, albeit slowly.

After the clock runs through a full cycle of blood (six gallons), the blood loses its potency and must be replaced. Regardless of how often the clock is used, it cannot reduce a person's physical age to less than one-half their actual age. If the clock is used to reduce a person's age by more than 25%, that person becomes tied to the blood in the clock; for every hour that the clock runs without blood, beyond this point, that person is physically aged by two years. This can result in aging of the body beyond the person's actual age.

Weight: 75 lbs.; Study Time: 2d4 weeks.

Adventure Idea

A wealthy PC is invited by an acquaintance to attend a small, intimate weekend gathering. The "friend" intends to run the clock with fresh blood. He hopes that by reducing the physical age of his acquaintances, he will gain influence over them. By controlling their access to the clock, he will control them. The PC must find a way to prevent, or slow the effects of the clock.

Atomic Zombies of the Pacific

An Adventure for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*

by Matt Riggsby

"We found the one spot that hadn't been touched by the war and blew it to hell."

--Bob Hope, on Operation Crossroads

After the United States' nuclear-powered victory in World War II, the military was eager to play with their new toy and see how well the A-bomb really performed. The ashes of Nagasaki and Hiroshima had hardly cooled when atomic testing began the Bikini atoll, part of the Marshall Island chain in the eastern Pacific. In our world, the islands remain a largely deserted relic of the dawn of the atomic age, but in this adventure, past violence has come back to haunt the present.

This adventure could be set at any time from the late 1940s to the present (or, indeed, into the near future), although the closer the adventure is set to the original tests, the greater the threat will be of residual radiation and the greater the pressure of the Cold War. Most of the PCs should be scientists or military, police, or security personnel, but the odd sailor, pilot, or journalist could fit in as well. They will be called upon to investigate the mysterious disappearance of a group of scientists from a location which is, if not off-limits, then at least sensitive. At least some of the characters should have skill with diving, for reasons which will become clear. Stats are presented for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, but this scenario could fit into a number of modern-day games (this adventure doesn't present an entire Deadworld as such, but depending on the origin of the atomic zombies, one could be derived from it). It's a fairly straightforward scenario for *Call of Cthulhu* or *Delta Green*, or a curve ball for a more conventional espionage or military game.

Operation Crossroads

In the summer of 1946, the US Navy brought a collection of obsolete vessels ranging from landing boats and floating drydocks to capital ships to the Bikini atoll. Among the ships were the American aircraft carrier USS Saratoga, the German cruiser Prinz Eugen, and the Japanese battleship Nagata, one-time flagship of the imperial fleet; the Nagata had been pressed into service for the operation so quickly and Japanese capabilities were so strained at the end of the war that the bodies of as many as a hundred of the crew killed in its last action were still aboard.

The derelict fleet was brought to this collection of small Pacific islands for Operation Crossroads. Crossroads was the first postwar test of nuclear weapons. The object was to see how nuclear blasts would affect a fleet at sea. Once the 170 native Bikinians were whisked away to safer locations and permanent refugee status, two bombs were detonated: Abel was an air burst, Baker was set off at the surface. The immediate effect was, for some, disappointing. No vessels were vaporized (though several were tossed about impressively by Baker) and the only major ships to sink were those relatively close to the blast. Nevertheless, analysts determined that, although an atom bomb wouldn't immediately send a fleet to the bottom, damage to equipment and injuries to crew would disable it just as certainly. And crews examining the vessels discovered a new problem: they just couldn't get the radiation off. Scrubbing the decks of the ships with a wide variety of cleaning products didn't clear the ships of radioactivity; the initial blast had made the metal itself faintly radioactive.

Through the 40s and 50s, the Bikini atoll was subjected to further atomic tests, including the detonation of the first H-bomb, which destroyed three of the atoll's islands. But as above-ground testing went out of fashion at the end of the 50's, the islands were abandoned to be visited occasionally by scientists measuring the long-term effects of the many blasts, scuba enthusiasts diving the wrecks sunk by Crossroads, and representatives of the native Bikinians, who still want to return home. And the wrecks of the Crossroads fleet remain at the bottom of the lagoon, stewing under a layer of faintly radioactive mud.

Welcome to Bikini

As the adventure opens, the agency the PCs work for has received word that a party of five government scientists, along with a few support personnel, studying long-term effects of radiation on Bikini and the state of the sunken fleet in the lagoon has vanished. The last radio contact was four days ago, and the weekly supply boat which visited them found their camp empty of people and in disarray. Some windows were broken, a tent or two knocked over, and papers scattered. Because of the importance of the missing people and the sensitivity of the location, the government isn't trusting the search and rescue mission to the local authorities. The PCs are dispatched to the island to find out what happened to them. In addition to whatever other gear they bring, they will be provided with at least a week's worth of food, medical supplies, maps, scuba gear, and a boat or an aircraft (there's a small landing strip) large enough to carry them and, hopefully, the five scientists. However, if they need later assistance, it would take at least a day for another boat to reach the island and even longer to organize and dispatch specialized gear or heavily armed support.

The Bikini atoll describes a rough oval about eight by twenty miles, the skeletons of endless generations of coral grown up on long-extinct volcanoes. Background radiation is low enough that scientific and tourist parties can spend weeks at a time there, although permanent occupation will expose residence to more radiation than is considered safe. The risk is long term, increased chance of cancer and the like rather than radiation burns.

Bikini Islands



If one can ignore the circumstances of the PCs' visit and forget that some of the curves in the shorelines were caused by hydrogen bomb blasts, the atoll borders on idyllic. It consists mostly of white sand beach, with thick patches of vegetation above high tide level. Bikini is the largest of the islands, perhaps two and a half miles long and a quarter mile across. The remains of bunkers, water tanks, and observation posts can be found through the atoll, but most are overgrown. Only a small research station currently serves as shelter; visitors must bring their own tents to sleep in.

When the PCs arrive, they'll find things in rather worse shape than described. The station proper is (or, at least, was)

simply a small laboratory for basic chemical and radiological research, with stocks of chemicals, glassware, and measuring equipment, and a generator to power lights, equipment, and a long-range radio. Visitors had to bring their own tents to sleep in. However, the PCs will discover that the lab has been ransacked, with the entire contents either smashed or removed. Also removed is the generator and the large tank that supplied it with fuel. All of the tents have collapsed or been knocked over, and papers can be found scattered far and wide by the wind. There are no bodies immediately in evidence, but one of the tents is badly bloodstained. If the PCs think to gather up the scattered papers (they could easily spend two or three hours doing so) or dig around in the debris of the laboratory, a character with appropriate scientific skills will be able to figure out that they indicate higher-than-expected levels of radioactivity in the lagoon. A more careful analysis will indicate that the team was spending more and more time underwater.

Expanding their search, what they find will provide more questions than answers. The boat dock near the research station has also been stripped of all useful equipment, some of it forcibly (they'll notice this first if they arrive by sea), although the small fuel dump and tool shed by the airstrip is so far untouched. A survey of any relatively clear areas on the island will also reveal a number of footprints. Expert trackers will notice that some of them are very fresh, perhaps made within the last day or two, long after contact with the island was lost. They may also find a few locations where the vegetation has been recently torn up. Some will be simply holes in the ground, where something has clearly been ripped from the ground, but there will be remains in others: cinder-block foundations for old, collapsed buildings, the bases of old towers once used to hold detection equipment, and so on. In each case, the vegetation from there to the lagoon will show signs of damage, as if heavy objects were carried or dragged through.

Particularly sharp-eyed characters may notice broken-open coconuts and the remains of a few large fish well inland, suggesting that someone or something is has been eating them recently. If they have infrared sensing gear, they will catch glimpses of a relatively large (a human, large dog or ape, small deer, or similarly sized creature) in the small but thick forest that covers Bikini proper, but it will flee if they move in its direction. They may even hear something moving though the underbrush. Nothing larger than a moderately-sized bird is native to Bikini, so alert PCs will probably start to wonder what's in the woods and why it's avoiding them.

Staying On The Surface

If the PCs don't hit the water, they can find little information on their own. They'll find out enough in time, but it may be too late to do them any good.

Whatever is eating the fish and coconuts and keeping an eye on the PCs is reasonably clever, but not infallible, and a careful attempt to surround it or drive it into the open will eventually succeed. "It," as it happens, is Kessai, a native Bikinian who came to the island with the scientific team as a guide, observer for his people, and general assistant. He has been surviving on what food he could gather for the past several days while staying under cover and on the move as much as possible. He saw the PCs from a distance, but wasn't sure that it would be safe to approach them. Why? He's got a story:

The expedition to the atoll was unremarkable until about a week ago, about the time the outside world lost contact with them. One of the scientists had mentioned that, during the day's dive, he had seen some glowing spots underwater, apparently moving under their own power. Bioluminescent fish at such shallow depths would be a remarkable discovery, but they had been sufficiently far away that he simply noted the fact, intending to get a closer look on the next day's dive. He never got the chance. That night, a number of bloated, faintly glowing, man-like shapes swarmed over the camp, attacking the scientists and carrying off their equipment. Kessai was lucky enough to be visiting the latrine when the attack started, so he was awake and a bit away from the camp, giving him the chance to flee. He hasn't seen any of the scientists since. The creatures returned to the island the next two nights, coming out of the lagoon and methodically tearing apart the scientists' camp and research station, while Kessai watched from a distance, making sure they didn't get too close to him. He believes that they have come onto the island farther up and down the shoreline as well and quite possibly onto other islands in the atoll, although he hasn't gone to look. The PCs will probably correctly conclude that the scientists are dead, but they're still charged with figuring out what happened to them.

If the PCs inspect the other islands, they'll find that a few remnants of old structures have been torn out there as well, and drag marks indicating heavy objects will again lead back to the lagoon. If they inspect the sites closely, they'll

eventually come across a few scraps of cloth torn off on branches. Characters with particularly deep knowledge of military history will recognize insignia of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

If the PCs find themselves on islands other than Bikini at night, there's a 1 in 6 chance that they'll run into a party of five to ten atomic zombies searching for parts (see below for zombie stats). If they're keeping watch around the lagoon, a pair of binoculars might pick out a group of zombies coming out of the lagoon, but their dim glow could easily be mistaken for a reflection of the moon or stars. If the PCs don't venture underwater or otherwise disturb the lagoon, their boat or plane will be attacked on their third night and any useful equipment and fuel dragged off. Attacks on a boat will be particularly difficult to defend against, since the atomic zombies will be attacking it from *underneath*, tearing it open below the waterline. If the PCs are present for but survive that attack, the zombies will be out in force the next and every night thereafter, trying to find and kill them.

Underwater

Underwater Map



The water of the lagoon is warm and clear, but even in the crystalline waters of the Pacific, visibility at 170 feet is limited to the range of a flashlight. A little careful navigation can get divers right above the ships they want to see, but it's a long, dark way down. Nineteen sunken craft litter the bottom, rusting and covered with silt and sea growth. They are scattered over an area with a radius of about a mile, with the largest ships tending closer to the center. Ground zero for the Abel and Baker blasts is about three miles southwest of Bikini island.

The missing scientists started by inspecting smaller vessels. If the PCs do so, they'll find very little except for slightly higher than expected radiation levels. Particularly observant PCs may notice that one or two of the smaller vessels the scientists didn't inspect are missing. Close investigation will show broken and displaced coral, depressions in the silt where vessels once lay, and enormous drag marks pointing in the general direction of ground zero of the original Abel and Baker blasts.

As they close in on ground zero, they'll start to see faint glowing spots moving through the water near the bottom, but it'll be difficult to tell exactly what until they get very close because of the darkness and silt being kicked up. Those spots of light become more plentiful near the remains of the battleship Nagato, although they'll also see some around the Saratoga and, in the appropriate scenario, the Prinz Eugen (see "What Bikini Leaves To The Imagination"). Geiger counters will indicate even higher levels of radiation in those areas, most notably the Prinz Eugen.

The spots of light are, of course, atomic zombies, but getting close enough to them to confirm that and figure out what they're doing is extremely dangerous. Unless the PCs have brought some kind of extra propulsion with them, the zombies are actually faster than they are underwater, although no less clumsy than on land. If the zombies spot the PCs, they will give chase. They will hesitate before leaving the water in daylight, but otherwise will not give up the chase until the PCs are dead or they are themselves destroyed.

But should the PCs come within flashlight range of the zombie-infested ships, they'll see that the atomic zombies are carrying out repairs, using the remains of other ships and equipment from the surface for materials and spare parts. The ships are still old, rusty, battered, and at the bottom of the lagoon, but crude repairs have clearly been made to their hulls. The zombies themselves, the deceased crew of the Nagato, are wearing decayed and tattered Japanese naval uniforms and faintly glow in the dark.

So what revived them? Why are they repairing the old ships? Just what's going on? The GM has a number of choices . . .

What Bikini Leaves To The Imagination

Depending on the campaign, several possibilities suggest themselves:

Deutschland Über Alles: Unknown to the PCs, the Prinz Eugen was the world's first nuclear-powered vessel, its unique power plant installed as a last-ditch experiment by German mad scientists in November of 1944. In this scenario, the zombies have been animated by an unexpected side effect of the reactor's unusual (and, some might say, unholy) design. The dead Japanese entombed in the Nagato have risen and are now taking steps to continue their fight against the Americans, one of the few specific aims left in their undead brains. By a combination of force of will and weird science, they'll eventually relaunch the Nagato, the Saratoga, and the Prinz Eugen and attack America (or, at least, American ships). Dismantling the reactor will cut off the zombies' power supply (a constant stream of zombies into and out of the Prinz Eugen may tip them off that that ship holds the answer), and they'll become weaker in hours and inactive before the day is out.

Magic Of The Islands: Some of the Bikinians have decided to take direct action against their oppressors. Using native magic, they have raised the dead and are well on the way towards using them as part of a hideous plot for revenge on the United States Navy. Kessai, in this scenario, is a magician, the one actually casting spells and directing the zombies (although not with any great degree of control; through magic rituals, he can animate the dead and give them general goals, but he can't give them direct orders and is in as much danger from the zombies as the PCs are if they catch up with him). Again, the zombies are trying to raise the ships and attack America. In this scenario, Kessai has to perform rituals nightly to maintain his spell; if he can be stopped, the zombies will become inactive by the next morning.

It's Old Man Withers From The Amusement Park!: Finally, there's the Scooby Doo option: the zombies are fakes. This might make a surprising

You Can't Handle The Truth

We're glossing over a few facts for dramatic purposes, but in case anyone's interested: Bikini Atoll hasn't been *completely* deserted since the atomic tests. It was reoccupied by the natives for most of the 1970s. However, they were forced to abandon the atoll again when it was discovered that radioactive cesium levels in the soil were too high. Visitors after that point will discover the remains of the village that was built for them, only to be abandoned again. Radioactive isotope levels are still too high for agriculture and therefore permanent residents, but the atoll was opened for scuba diving in 1996, and the sunken fleet has become a popular destination for adventurous divers. The atoll

change of pace in a supernatural campaign, or a double-cross in a mundane campaign (the players may be led to believe that the GM is changing the campaign to include supernatural elements; won't they be surprised when they find out the truth?). A secret organization (devious Communists, a top-secret American agency, a surviving faction of Nazis or Japanese, etc.) has set up shop at the bottom of the lagoon. They're turning the sunken ships into a secret submarine base from which to research the remnants of the atomic bomb tests and thereby reverse-engineer nuclear weapons. The so-called zombies are actually agents in disguised wet suits attempting to scare off potential interlopers.

Saying Farewell To The Islands

The climax of this adventure will have the PCs either discovering a nest of zombies underwater or being subjected to constant zombie attacks, with any possible backup at least a day or two away. Unless they manage to finger the Prinz Eugen or Kessai as the cause, it's going to be a running battle for survival through the ruins of old warships or the small but thick jungles of the atoll (in the Scooby scenario, there's no easy way to fix the problem, but at least there aren't really any zombies).

Assuming they live through it, it may not be over yet. No matter what, the PCs have first hand knowledge of a new and strange threat to world peace. If the zombies were raised by a German nuclear reactor, the PCs may be sent to investigate other toxic relics of the Nazi past. If Kessai is at fault, the PCs may find themselves on the front line of a secret war between Polynesian shamans and western secret agents. If it's a secret organization, their well-heeled sponsors will have to be tracked down. No matter what, though, they'll never look at recreational scuba diving the same way again.

Atomic Zombie Stats

Getting around: Slow and steady; aquatic

Weak spot: Head

Strength: Strong like bull; Iron Grip

Senses: Like the dead

Sustenance: For "Deutschland Über Alles," the zombies require proximity to the Prinz Eugen's reactor to keep their batteries charged, as it were. For "Magic of the Islands," they're maintained by Kessai's rituals.

Intelligence: Teamwork

Spreading the love: NA; these zombies are generated by either magic or post-mortem exposure to weird Nazi radiation.

Skills: Brawling 1; presumably, the zombies also have residual skills in shipfitting and ship handling.

Although the atomic zombies are, in fact, faintly radioactive, their glow is a secondary effect of either unusual radiation or Bikinian magic. They display a sort of hive intelligence and are deadliest in large numbers, when they can coordinate their individually clumsy actions.

now hosts growing research facilities, a base for construction and radiological cleanup, and bare-bones resort facilities for scuba divers. If the adventure is set after the mid-1990s, the whole resort will have been trashed by the time the PCs get there, and as many as a dozen tourists and a few dive operators will be missing along with the scientists.

Oh, and the Prinz Eugen was damaged at Bikini, but not sunk there. It capsized in shallow water at the nearby Kwajalein atoll a few months after the initial Bikini tests and its stern can still be seen protruding from the water today. If you're using the "Deutschland Über Alles" scenario, you'll have to tweak history a bit.

Pyramid Review

The Count of Carcassonne (for Carcassonne)

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

12 full-color tiles, wooden count pawn, rules sheet; \$6.00

When you hit on a good idea with a game but you can't go bigger with it, the easiest thing to do would seem to be go smaller. [Carcassonne](#) has had more than its share of success, and parlayed that into at least four other versions of the main game, but some of its supplements these days are positively miniscule. Meet ***The Count of Carcassonne***.

This set, which comes in a container about the size of an engagement ring display box, comprises 12 tiles -- the same type as those used in the Carcassonne game, but they are used in place of the starting tile from that product. Arranged in three rows of four, they form a picture of the city of Carcassonne, complete with four city quarters: the market, the cathedral, the blacksmith, and the castle. A special wooden pawn, the count, is included and starts play in the castle. (Presumably this new starting point counts as one of the cities for which farms will score at the end of the game -- the rules don't spell that out.)

The game proceeds normally (if the river is being used, players put the spring adjacent to the city and move outward from there before getting underway). With this set in use, if a player places a tile that scores points for one or more opponents while gaining nothing himself, he is allowed to place one of his pawns in any quarter of the city. At this point he may also move the count from one city quarter to another. This "meeple" is now stored and may be used later in the game to shift the scoring. Who gets points for a map feature depends on the number of pawns players have committed to it, and the count provides a mechanic for changing the numbers.

Which features the pawn can enter depends on the quarter it occupies. For example, a unit in the castle quarter can be used when someone finished up a city -- if your opponent had one pawn in a completed city, your stockpiled meeple could be throw in, and the two of you, now tied with one follower each on that feature, would have to share the points. Pawns at the blacksmith's change the scores for completed roads, those in the cathedral work in a cloister, and a piece in the market can tilt the meeple count on the farms at the end of the game. Although he moves from one sector to another, the count never leaves the city, and more importantly no pawns can be pulled from his current quarter to change scores -- players may use the count to block the use of the spare counters.

The tiles are the same as those in the original, both in material and artwork, so quality isn't an issue. The pieces even have numbers on the backs to make it easier to construct the "puzzle" pieces quickly. The count is made of wood just as the other pawns are, though it's about twice their size. The one real complaint is the city's layout: Don't lose the instruction sheet, lest you forget which quarters are which. The diagram in the rules is clear -- each quarter is labeled with text there -- but the city picture you build is only visual. You may remember the quarters and the features to which each corresponds; then again, after leaving the game in the closet for a month, you may forget. Not every city feature is as easy to identify as the cathedral, and including small written labels like those in ***Carcassonne: The City*** wouldn't have killed anyone.

The Count of Carcassonne is another nice supplement for the system, but on the other hand...it's another supplement for the system. This one is easily compatible with the many other sets and, unlike the ***King & Scout*** add-on that had tiles for two different versions of the game, it doesn't require any of them to be useful and interesting. But so many of these supplements, while they're an inexpensive way to perk up the game, begin to have a cascading effect. If you use all of them, they interact in more and more ways and make it harder to develop a consistent strategy. Worse, it alters

one of the game's longest-standing rules -- that of maneuvering to have the most pieces on a tile feature -- which may upset the purists.

But given how modular all these components are, you can add and subtract what you like and play the version that suits you best. That you can make these decisions for less than you'd pay for a fast-food combo meal means ***The Count of Carcassonne*** is a real bargain.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

Don't Walk in Winter Woods: A Game of Folkloric Fear

Published by Xolis.net

Written by Clint Krause

17-Page PDF Document; \$5.00

Don't Walk in Winter Woods: A Game of Folkloric Fear is a storytelling game that encourages the telling of tales around a campfire on a cold winter's night. As the title suggests these tales should be about our fear of the unknown that lies inside the eerie gloom of the woods that stand forebodingly on the very edge of the village. The game falls into the genre of the dark whimsy, that of the American Gothic, best typified by Half Meme Press' [My life With Master](#), Atlas Games' [Gloom -- The Game of Inauspicious Incidents & Grave Consequences](#), and Ronin Arts' *Vs. Monsters*. Its inspirations are given in movie terms as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Brotherhood of the Wolf*, but more obviously are Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow* and M. Night Shyamalan's *The Village*, particularly the latter. This shows in the setting of the game, an unnamed and isolated settlement in late 18th century post-revolution America, on the edge of a forest with a forbidding presence and an ominous reputation.

Designed for three to four players, plus the Watcher (or GM), the intention of the designer of *Don't Walk in Winter Woods* is that it be played somewhere cold and dark. So if not out in the woods or around a campfire, it is probably best to turn down the light and leave the windows open. The game's mechanics require no more than a single six-sided die along with six beads per player. No character sheet is needed as the process of character creation extends just as far as a name, an occupation, and a reason for entering the Winter Wood.

A character has just a single statistic: the Cold. Cold points are acquired over the course of a game or storytelling session, given out by the Watcher. Cold works as a measure of the mental and physical suffering that a character takes over the course of the tale. At the beginning of a game, prior to entering the Winter Woods, a character's Cold is equal to zero. It rises to one as soon as the Woods are entered, at which point it becomes the attribute against which any kind of action is rolled against. This can include attempting to listen for strange noises, attempting to sneak up on the isolated cabin deep in the Woods, or to discharge a musket at an enraged bear. At which point the player rolls the die with a result higher than his character's current Cold points being a success, while anything equal to, or less than his Cold points, means a failure.

More Cold points come from being bashed, stabbed, shot, or falling, or from sharp shocks, frights, and other encounters with the supernaturally inexplicable. Eventually the character will suffer enough blows and scares that he is given his sixth Cold point. At this point, he is incapable of further action, having been rendered unconscious from severe wounds or profound horror, modelled in game terms by the fact that a player cannot roll above six on the die. The concept of having an attribute become more difficult to roll against as it is reduced by an in-game effect is not new, having been pioneered by the Sanity rules of Chaosium's [Call of Cthulhu](#), but *Don't Walk in Winter Wood* takes it a step further by applying it to a character's physical state as well as his mental one. The author goes further though, reducing the concept to a simple elegance, the effect of which is that the game's mechanics do not impinge either the play or the storytelling.

The latter because the game is played by telling a story. These cannot be told or played in the traditional first person, present tense of most RPGs. Rather, all actions are described in the third person, past tense. Thus not, "I [as Ephraim Fletcher] will stop and wait at the edge of the clearing and listen," but "Ephraim Fletcher tarried at the edge of the clearing's edge and cupped a hand to his ear to better capture the sounds of the forest." At which point, the player would of course, roll against Ephraim's Cold points. Players wanting more detail in the rules, or disliking the fact that

it is very much up to the Watcher to describe the effects of their actions, rather than having them dictated by the roll of the die, should of course, look elsewhere.

Beyond the simplicity of the rules, the bulk of ***Don't Walk in Winter Wood*** is given over to describing a sample setting simply known as the Village. The self-sufficient and isolated settlement directly abuts the Winter Woods, known for the chills within and for its long history of strange happenings. Many of the Village's legends are associated with the local Indians, while others tie into tales of witchcraft and missing children. Despite its reputation, the characters have little choice but to enter Winter Wood, whether to look for a missing child, to track down the creature responsible for the spate of recent cattle mutilations, to locate the rare herbs needed to cure a sick villager, or just to obtain food at a time of crop failure. These are just starting points, as the legends, but there is also a ready-to-play adventure, "The Witch's Curse," included with the game.

Don't Walk in Winter Wood is so rules light that it can played without reference to its rules. And together with the beads handed out as Cold points, might prove an encumbrance on a camping trip. If so, then the beads could easily be replaced by a player counting the Cold points gained on the fingers of one hand. After all, it is not absolutely necessary to hand out *that* sixth Cold point, and nor is it necessary for players to have six fingers on the one hand.

There is a vagueness to ***Don't Walk in Winter Wood***, but where that would be a problem in other games, here it is the point. The stories told through ***Don't Walk in Winter Wood*** refer back to legends, folklore, tales, and possible events that date back hundreds of years. Thus nothing in this game, beyond the rules for Cold points, can be described as definite or absolute. Yet this does not mean that the game is lacking in terms of information that could inspire the Watcher to create tales of his own.

While the mechanics of Cold points are a simple and polished method of handling a character's mental state, they also serve to model the narrative structure of the game's genre. The degree of peril increasing as the tale progresses and draws closer to its denouement all reflected in the growing difficulty of character actions as more Cold points are handed out. All the game needs then is the Watcher to inspire the right mood of fear and disquiet, because otherwise, ***Don't Walk in Winter Woods: A Game of Folkloric Fear*** is an idea well executed.

--Matthew Pook

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Th3 Numb3rs Gam3

I've been giving way too much thought to game design issues lately, working out game mechanics at my Day Job for the forthcoming [FNORD], the still-in-development [DELETED], and the nascent [YOU'RE NOT CLEARED FOR THAT]. So I've been crunching numbers, running through a jillion mental permutations, and devising a thousand off-case scenarios. Remember: Working for a game company is fun.

Anyway, I think I've come across a secret in game design – a secret that's quite probably obvious to many of you, but one that I've come to greatly appreciate as I've been working on various projects. In fact, it's one I used yesterday on my Day Job's daily-or-so blog – [the one I'd never be so crass as to promote here](#).

I'm coming to realize that, in as many ways as I can, I'm going to try to derive numbers from other numbers in gaming. For a surprising number of games, I've discovered an elegance to figuring out what went wrong or right with a roll, and using that number elsewhere.

An easy example is the classic *Dungeons & Dragons* game. I haven't kept up with the *d20 System* much (despite, erm, having worked on a magazine devoted to it for almost a year and creating an adventure for it), but I think it's similar to older versions of the game, where one's attack roll doesn't have any bearing on damage. If that's the case, then an option to make things more interesting would be to apply the difference between the resultant attack roll and the necessary attack roll to the damage. (Thus if you needed a 12 to hit and you rolled an 18, you'd get an extra 6 points of damage.) While making melee more deadly – since everyone would deal more damage – it might also speed up combats a bit, which I've always had a hard time with when I've played.

As another example, the classic game Yacht (Or *Yahtzee*, for those of you playing the crass commercial version) revolves entirely around numbers – particularly number of dice and number of rolls. One variant I came up with a while ago was the ability to "bank" rolls; that is, if you only use two of your three rolls, then you can save that third roll to use again in a later turn (probably when you utterly fail to get anything good on your first three allowed rolls). However, as another option, what if, instead of saving banked rolls for rolls in the future, you were instead saving those rolls to turn into additional dice for future rolls? You would only get those extra dice for one roll (and not one round of three rolls), so you'd need to choose carefully when you want a fist-full of dice.

As a slightly tangential example, let's take the game *Monopoly*. (Please!) One of the problems with this "perennial classic" (Latin for "overrated and/or boring") is that the player does very little playing for much of the game; there isn't much strategy beyond deciding whether or not you should buy a property you land on (yes), whether or not you should pay to get out of jail (almost always yes), or whether or not you should build property (probably). Most of the "strategy" of the game boils down to haggling and making deals with other players; unfortunately, there is almost always a mathematically "better" deal on one of the two halves of any trade in the game (pretty much only tempered by the luck of the dice), so in any trade there's going to be a sucker and a suckee. (Besides the inherent "suckee"-ness of the game itself, that is . . .)

To offer a completely untested option: What if you instituted a new rule that gave players a new choice . . . one that wasn't *too* attractive, but offered much more strategy and control for the player. (And one that took the values of existing numbers and used them.) Namely, paying to modify roll results.

In this variant, I'd probably break the game down into two stages: Before all the properties are owned and after. Before they're all owned, players may choose – after they rolled the dice – to modify their roll by 1 for every \$100 they spend. For example, if a player rolled a 9 and he really needed an 11, he could pay \$200 to change his die roll to an 11. After all the properties are owned, the \$100-per-pip turns into a \$1,000 per pip. (Thus turning that 2 into a 12 would cost \$10,000.)

It would be up to the group to decide how this played out: Could you modify a roll to above or below what's possible, such as buying a 1 or 13? (I'd say no.) Can you "buy" a doubles roll, to go again? (I'd say no.) Can you modify the result of a doubles roll, and still roll again? (I'd say yes.)

Numbers come into play because, in my back-of-the-envelope calculations, each extra (or fewer) "square" comes to be worth about \$100 at the beginning of the game – is the Reading Railroad *really* worth an extra \$100 or \$200? However, it should have the effect of allowing people to complete monopolies much more quickly, since they could get it "naturally" rather than rely on another player's goodwill or bad decision.

By the end of the game, I calculate that \$1,000 is going to be slightly more or less than a maxed-out property value. But, since most properties are within 1 or 2 of each other, you generally will need to pay at least \$2,000 to avoid another player's completed property.

Another interesting aspect of this variant is that it destroys capital; the other players don't get these payments, but they go back into the bank. (Whatever you do, I recommend against putting this money into the center as part of the Free Parking freak-of-nature optional rule.)

In all, most games revolve around numbers in some way. And those numbers are surprisingly similar – or so easily translated into other situations that it doesn't take much thought. A -3 penalty here can just as easily turn into a +3 bonus elsewhere. Just so long as the modifiers are consistent or used on all sides (so a modifier doesn't give one group a big bonus), it should be fine.

Play with the numbers and see what you can come up with. You might breathe life into an old favorite, or tweak a game more to your liking. Who knows? You can't juggle the numbers any worse than most dot-com accountants.

--Steven Marsh

Icosahedron Adventures

Tudor's Guide to Angel's Harbor (Part II) Organizations and Neighborhoods of a Modern Superheroic *d20* System Campaign

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Editor's Note: The first part of this two-part series appeared [last week](#). To the archives, sidekick!

Businesses, Companies and Corporations

A number of corporations are based in Angel's Harbor, with most found in the Circuit.

Café Justice

Café Justice is a nation chain of superhero-themed restaurants, with its corporate headquarters in Angel's Harbor. Each restaurant has a unique collection of hero and villain memorabilia, as well as a selection of "secret-base" decor and a gift shop. The spokesman for Café Justice is, of course, Captain Justice, a caped superhero who never does commercials, but does show up for grand openings, and occasionally eats in the VIP section of restaurants in larger cities, especially in Angel's Harbor. The company was making money easily in the 1990s, but has suffered some in the new millennium, largely because its restaurants don't seem as new or hip as they were in their first decade.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** The vast majority of the memorabilia in a Café Justice is fake, though often made from molds taken of actual hero and villain apparel. In particular, nothing dangerous is ever real. Occasionally bits of hero costumes and equipment used by minor local villains are genuine.
- **DC 15:** Café Justice legally licenses the materials and images it uses from heroes and even villains. In many cases, heroes have their profits sent to charities, and villains have theirs sent to victim recompense funds (to increase chances of early parole).
- **DC 20:** Captain Justice is, in fact, a real superbeing, though not an active superhero. He's invulnerable to all known forms of attack and coercion, allowing him to survive the periodic efforts by some villain to destroy him to make a point.
- **DC 25:** The Café Justice corporation is actually run by a group of retired superheroes, who needed an investment as well as the opportunity to build a series of small secret bases (also known as "VIP Rooms") across the US.

Cloak and Cowl Costumes

Known as 3C, Cloak and Cowl Costumes is one of the world's most famous costume makers -- which isn't saying much in most circles. Most of 3C's work comes from theater, television and movie productions, which is why its four national offices are all located in major visual production towns -- including Angel's Harbor. In addition to normal costuming, 3C can build a wide variety of worn items, including utility belts, wire harnesses, body armor, concealed holsters, grapple gauntlets, multi-spectrum goggles, reversible outfits, wigs, and eyeglasses specially designed to

conceal the wearer's face by subtly drawing the viewers eye to minor features and away from major ones.

Of course, the other uses for such paraphernalia is hero and villain activities. While 3C does sell to the public, they do so cautiously. Any purchase of something more advanced than a cape and mask requires an account be set up with a security number (though no personal data is taken). A single item of note may then be purchased, but there's a six-month waiting period before anything else can be bought. This allows 3C to avoid becoming a supplier to fly-by-night vigilantes and villains. Company representatives look through crime reports to see if any of their gear has been used inappropriately. Any account that shows a pattern of abuse is closed. Of course, for a skin-tight suit with a spider on the chest no such precautions are taken. And once an account has a security number, it can order new copies of the same costume by phone, fax, or e-mail with secure drops sites. No one knows just how many heroes use 3C costumes, but chances are it's much higher than the number with the skills needed to sew their own.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** 3C is part of a much larger English corporation -- Royal Technologies, a major competitor with Sterling Industries.
- **DC 20:** If 3C comes to believe a given account is being used by a worthwhile hero, they begin to give deep discounts.
- **DC 30:** Since many heroes depend on 3C to keep their identities secret and their costumes patched, they watch over it carefully. No crime against 3C has even gone unsolved, or valuables stolen unreturned.

The Daily Sidekick

The Daily Sidekick is a national newspaper that focuses on events in the world of superheroes, vigilantes, mystery men, and the villains that foil them. Advertising itself as "The Journal of Record for Heroes and Villains since 1970," the Daily Sidekick has actually only existed as an independent paper for 15 years or so. Before that it was just a series of articles by ace reporter Thomas Payne in the Angel's Harbor Choir, a struggling local paper. As Payne became more famous, the choir more successful and heroes more common, the Sidekick articles became a small insert section detailing paranormal and heroic events from across the country. Eventually Payne retired as a reporter and bought the rights to the Sidekick from the Choir, re-creating it as an independent national paper.

Payne is now senior editor and does very little reporting of his own. He does have a good sense for a story, and is the final authority on what articles get printed, what get held for further research, what get passed over to the legal authorities, and what get kill-filed. His current ace reporter is Misty Knight, who has a knack for getting scoops on superhero activity. She's been casually linked in romances with several heroes and a few villains, though never by a reputable paper.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** Payne has a pro-hero bias, and isn't afraid to admit it. Anyone who is giving real heroes a bad time, or giving heroes a bad name, is treated poorly in his paper.
- **DC 20:** Ms. Knight is not romantically involved with any superhero, villain, or vigilante. In fact she's so busy she rarely dates at all, but when she does she makes it clear that anyone who turns out to have an alternate identity is going to get kicked and possibly sued. She does, however, have a number of heroes as friends, and often does research for them on big cases. Much less often, she squashes a lead at the request of a very trusted friend.
- **DC 30:** Mr. Payne was a masked adventurer during his reporting days, going under the name Danger Man. Not only does he not do that anymore, he keeps a sharp eye on his employees to make sure they aren't secretly heroes or villains. He considers the resources of the paper to be too valuable to allow them to become the tool of costumed adventurers -- he does entertain serious requests to research his archives, but isn't willing to lose the reigns of power to any other vigilante type.

Federated Periodicals

Federated Periodicals is a comic publisher. They focus mostly on short runs of independent comics, which are creator-owned and controlled. The company also produces a few comic books that are officially sanctioned adaptation of the adventures of actual hero teams (especially those that operate in Angel's Harbor). With a strong fan base, the motto "Here Come the Feds!" is becoming an increasingly common sight at comic-book conventions. Though Federated can't hold a candle to the Big Two companies in terms of total sales, its popularity and quality continue to increase. Its stories are based on strong principles of storytelling rather than sensationalism, its art taken seriously, continuity carefully maintained, and its comics always ship on time.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** Federated Comics is owned by a larger, Russian publishing house that is running it as an experiment, and doesn't want its "serious" name associated with something as childish as comics.
- **DC 20:** If it seems too good to be true . . . it is. Federated comics is a front to launder money for the local Russian mob. It loses money hand over fist, but claims vast incomes to make illegal profits from elsewhere more easily spent.
- **DC 30:** A few employees at Federated know they actually work for the mob -- which is fine. It's their cover to look into the mob's activities, as they are themselves actually masked vigilantes posing as fanboy comic employees. This allows them to be seen carrying costumes, utility belts, and wombatarangs in duffle bags without anyone thinking twice.

Paragon American Executive Services

The legal company known as P.A.X. Services (or just PAX) is a small but powerful combination of law office, bank, and financial planning center that caters to the wealthy, eccentric, and those who wish to hide their true identity. Founded in the late 1930s to assist members of the Gangbusters vigilante group with efforts by the FBI to force them to work for the government, PAX has long had a reputation for being skilled, ethical, fearless crusaders for their clients. Of course, this makes them very unpopular with the government.

The primary services provided by the company are legal aid and banking. The laws regarding secret identities -- especially as they pertain to income tax, estate planning, and court appearances -- are a good deal more accommodating than they might be in a world without a rich tradition of masked superheroes, but they aren't any less complex than any other area of law. Without expert and experienced legal help, anyone trying to utilize the Mask Trust laws (essentially allowing someone to set up a legal "alternate" masked identity) is likely to slip up somewhere.

PAX can also act as a courier service, a middle-man for more traditional businesses, and even a clearinghouse for people with unusual abilities. It's not unknown for a hero or vigilante who cannot afford PAX's normal rates to trade labor (often in the form of bodyguarding a client or teleporting an important package to Japan instantly) for PAX's aid. Since PAX has a 70-year-long tradition of being honest and not using heroes to do anything nefarious, more superheroes trust it than any other corporation. PAX even keeps a number of trusted but retired heroes on its board of directors.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** Despite its reputation, most of PAX's clients are simply rich eccentrics who use things like the Mask Trust laws to gain some financial benefit.
- **DC 20:** PAX is an amoral organization built on total honesty and truthfulness. PAX senior partners see nothing wrong with taking advantage of a loophole, as long as it's a legal loophole. They twist the law to its outer extreme, but never break it.
- **DC 30:** The senior partners of PAX are mostly old gods. Much weaker than they were in their heyday, these gods use their divine powers to ensure PAX doesn't get out of control. Rather than send oracles and prophets to guide heroes of the world, they use lawyers and lobbyists.

Rushlight Lading

Rushlight Lading is a cargo, warehouse, and delivery company, with its US Corporate office in Angel's Harbor. They have 24-hour-service anywhere in the world, standard freight to most locales, and can be hired to take anything anywhere under the right circumstances (and for the right payment). They also have safety deposit boxes, vault storage, archival storage, and message delivery services. They famously claim that -- given a longitude, latitude, and delivery time -- they'll get it there. They are often hired to take valuable cargoes and unusual deliveries, such as zoo animals, mummies, sunken wrecks, and nuclear annihilation rays captured from a villain's stronghold. They deliver even to Antarctica, even in times of war, and even if the end destination has sunken into the Atlantic. They do not, however, do CODs.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** Rushlight Lading does a great deal of work for the government, including handling of secure warehouses where items of "unusual properties" are kept in permanent storage.
- **DC 20:** The company has "Rushlighters," agents trained to deal with the unusual, dangerous, supernatural, and superpowered.
- **DC 30:** The company specifically exists to keep safe a time machine built in 1888. The machine is to be delivered, intact and functional, to a specific location in Angel's Harbor in 2088 along with a cup of hot tea, a change of men's clothes in the current style, a concise history of 1888-2088, and a suitcase full of platinum bars. Everything the company does is based on having the resources and training needed to make sure the time machine is delivered as contracted, though only senior officials are aware of this.

Segefield Sanatorium for the Criminally Insane

Located in Coal Road, the Segefield Sanatorium is the only building left on the tall, barren hill it calls home. Built shortly before the Civil War, the Sanatorium was part of a push of industry that moved into Coal Road in the mid 1800s because of cheap land prices. Most of those businesses are long gone, but the Sanatorium has remained. Built by Doctor Segefield, the sanatorium was supposed to revolutionize treatment of the mentally ill. For example, it was built in the style of a gothic cathedral because the doctor believed such disturbing images as gargoyles would help scare the mentally ill to sanity, while heavy stone walls would give them a sense of stability. It didn't work.

In the 1950s it went from treating anyone mentally ill to focusing on the criminally insane. It now houses the worst psychos on the east coast. While it does not take prisoners with extreme superpowers, it has handled a number of mid-range psychotic powered villains over the years. Of course from time to time they break out, but that's proven true of any correctional facility, and Segefield has a better track record than most.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** Doctor Segefield himself went insane while working in the Sanatorium. Sadly, his condition was not discovered for several years -- resulting in unfortunate excesses on his part in the treatment of patients.
- **DC 15:** Segefield is run by a private corporation in conjunction with various federal agencies.
- **DC 20:** To prevent mental breakdowns, current policy is for no one to work at Segefield for more than 15 months.
- **DC 25:** Unfortunately, due to budget constraints and difficulty convincing new hires to take jobs at Segefield, the current administrator and senior staff have been running the place for over 36 months.

Sterling Industries

Sterling Industries (SI) is a corporation that deals primarily in high-tech development. It has military and civilian contracts, and partnerships with numerous other companies. It is most famous for being associated with three armor-wearing heroes called Green Knights. The first operated during WWII, with the next do operating from 1975-1990 and

1995-present. Each suit has been more advanced than the previous, and undergone numerous improvements during its time in service.

Since Green Knight suits are too expensive for mass deployment, in 1990 SI introduced Gatekeepers, less powerful versions of the second green Knight technology. Gatekeeper armor suits turn common guards into low-power superbeings, allowing them to act as security or guards for events likely to attract the attention of villains or superpowered detention facilities.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** SI has its roots back in WWII, when it was formed by Jonathan Sterling to develop improved armor for Allies vehicles and civilians. Mr. Sterling was revealed to be the first Green Knight, a 1940s and 1950s hero who wore a slow, clunky, but powerful suit of diesel-driven powered armor.
- **DC 15:** Current CEO James Sterling owns 75% of SI outright, allowing him to control the company with an iron grip if he's of a mind to. Despite that, he generally allows the board of directors to actually handle the companies affairs.
- **DC 20:** Though he has worn the suit from time to time, James Sterling is not the third, nor was he the second, Green Knight. Both roles were taken by professional soldiers hired for the part, and more than a dozen men have been "the" Green Knight since 1975.

NewsFax Network

A news company based locally in the Circuit, with smaller offices in major cities worldwide. Two things set NewsFax Network (NFN) apart from normal newspaper or television news companies. The first is the fact that NFN doesn't broadcast over cable or the airwaves or have a normal print newspaper. Instead NFN has a website with both free and pay content (as well as memberships with micropayment systems in place) and by sending a "newsfax" to the printers of customers who subscribe to their service. Such newsfaxes are timely, in-depth, and cater to the preferences of each subscriber.

Second, NFN is the only news company in the world to employ super-powered beings to get the news. Flying cameramen, psychic desk editors, shapeshifting undercover reporters, and super-genius tech-crews allows "NFN" crews to go anywhere faster and get closer. Their employees are often people who got their powers in accidents -- they have the abilities of heroes and villains, but prefer a 9-to-5 kind of job (with medical benefits). Certainly not all NFN's employees are superpowered, but those who are receive compensation commensurate to the work they produce (as do all NFN members, causing some of its highest-paid employees to be totally normal humans who have good instincts and work hard).

The company has yet to turn a profit, but has enough investment money to keep going for a few years. It hopes to increase subscriptions from both individuals and companies at 200% quarterly for the next four years, to reach the phenomenal numbers that are required for profitability. To boost its reputation as a fast and accurate source for exclusive news and pictures, NFN crews often get way too close to the action.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** NFN crews are willing to break a lot of laws to get an important news story, especially if they think they won't get caught.
- **DC 20:** There is currently a power struggle going on within NFN. Its founder, Aileen Vectra, insists on maintaining high ethical standards in the truthfulness and relevance of the news NFN reports (though she's willing to look the other way if the news is gathered in a questionable manner). The vice-president in charge of its entertainment division, Henry Quartz, is pushing for more "juicy" exclusive content. He uses the same semi-legal tactics to produce sex tapes, private e-mails and journals, and undercover reports on steamy subjects. So far Ms. Vectra has kept his worst excesses under control, but as the more outrageous reports bring in higher subscription rates, the investors are beginning to push to give Mr. Quartz greater leeway.

Tudor's Guides

Tudor's is a company famous for producing guidebooks for major cities around the world. It has a small office in the Circuit, as well it's only direct-to-the customer travel book shop.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** Tudor's guides treat superheroic activity like volcanoes -- great for tourists to see from a distance and something to recommend a city, but a hazard worth mentioning as well. Even so, most Tudor guides focus on cities with permanent hero groups or noteworthy vigilantes.
- **DC 20:** Although Tudors uses extensive freelancers for photography, research, layout and initial scouting of locations, all entries are actually written by Mr. Tudor, who no one ever sees.
- **DC 30:** Mr. Tudor is actually an alien who crashed on earth in the 1940s. He began scouting the planet in preparation of an invasion fleet. It never arrived, and he got tired of living on whatever he could steal without being noticed. He started writing guides as a way to make money that went hand-in-hand with his mission to scout the planet. Now, he rather hopes the fleet never shows up -- he's much wealthier as a famous guide author than a minor military scout.

Weekly Inquisitor

The Weekly Inquisitor set up shop in the Circuit shortly after the Sidekick did, and is in direct competition with the Sidekick. The Inquisitor bills itself as "The Only Paper Unafraid of the Truth," and fills its pages with conspiracy theories, bigfoot babies, and lurid tales of superheroes and their exploits in and out of costume. Some of this is actually fake of course, but in a world with heroes an amazing amount of weird stuff is real. If anyone threatens the paper with legal action its owner and chief editor, Victor Vancastle, immediately goes public about being "censored," and generally sells a lot more papers.

Information Checks

- **DC 10:** Half of everything in the Inquisitor is a fake . . . but only half.
- **DC 20:** Only about 25% of what's in the Inquisitor is completely fake, the rest has just been written up in the most sensational manner possible.
- **DC 30:** The Inquisitor is the project of the Grandmaster, a mastermind villain who does everything through intermediaries. He uses it to gain blackmail material and penetrate heroes' secret identities. Vancastle is in the Grandmaster's pocket.

Utilities

All the utility companies work together when trying to fix lost service as a result of super-being activity or paranormal events. While there is healthy competition in other areas, the phone, cable, gas, electricity, water, trash and sewage companies have discovered the only way to make a profit in a city where masked men fire protonic cannons at the invading hordes of the Crimson Crab is for everyone to pitch in together for emergencies. Mostly, this involves loaning each other capacity and work crews, providing competing customers services at cost during an emergency and sharing information.

The main utilities in Angel's Harbor Metropolitan area are as follows: Big Harbor Hydroelectric (environment-friendly electricity), Choir Communications (phone and cable), Lohann Drilling (gas, and no longer a drilling company), Pro Power (traditional electricity, with focus on the Lighthouse Nuclear Power Plant), and Stratollite (satellite-based television, internet and cell phones).

Information Checks

- **DC 15:** The most important utility facilities, including power transfer stations, offices, central operation centers and many of the access points to the city's crawlspaces, are protected by Gatekeepers from Sterling Industries. SI provides these services on a at-cost basis, in part to keep the flow of utilities to its own facilities uninterrupted, but also to help protect the community.
- **DC 25:** The utility companies of Angel's Harbor have a secret cooperative venture to hire, train and maintain an extraordinary services branch, called the Skeleton Crew. Whenever mole men chew throw wires, a supervillain threatens to flood the city with a hurricane, or sentient beings of living sewage get stuck in the pipes, the utility in question calls out the Skeleton Crew. Most Crewmen are failed heroes, agents who retired in disgrace, or villains on parole and looking for a legal job where turning into a giant wolverine is seen as an asset.

Sights

Some things in Angel's Harbor are worth stopping by just for the novelty.

The Hall of Liberty

Now a museum, the Hall represents the oldest known superhero meeting place in the US. Located in Holly Hills, the building is a solid stone, four-story structure built in 1776. It was used by the Liberty lads as a headquarters during the 50-year history of that group of mystery men and women.

Information Checks

- **DC 15:** The Liberty Lads disbanded in 1826, but a trust was established to maintain the hall in working order. Anyone who has a Liberty ring, of which 12 were made, can gain access to the hall and use it as a base of operations. The rings were given to offspring of the Liberty lads, though all are now believed lost.

The King Norton

A dirigible built in total secrecy just before World War II by a rich eccentric, but never taken into the air; it would have been the largest lighter-than-air ship ever to fly if it ever had. It is currently stored in a large hanger in the Station. Most of its systems seem very advanced for the era, though obviously they were all experimental and might not have worked. It's now a meeting hall used by flight enthusiasts for conventions and special presentations, and is open to the public on Wednesdays.

Information Checks

- **DC 25:** The King Norton is actually from an alternate reality, where it was part of the Philadelphia experiment run by the royal American Air Corps. If filled with helium, it would still fly. If its Philly Generators were powered (requiring a direct lightning strike) it might even return home.

The Pitt

An abandoned mine shaft in Coal Road, the Pitt is the deepest mine in the United States. It produced both coal and salt during its 200-year operating history, but was shut down in the 1960s. Though it's possible to look down into the Pitt, for safety reasons no one is allowed inside.

Information Checks

- **DC 30:** The Pitt penetrated to a pocket dimension where a vast cavern world exists, populated by dinosaurs and cavemen. It was closed down and sealed as a safety precaution. Once every 10 years, Liddenbrock Expeditions runs a single small party into the Pitt to ensure the pocket dimension is stable.

The Slaughterhouse Troll

A 20-foot statue under an overpass in the Slaughterhouse District, the Slaughterhouse Troll is, according to legend, an actual troll summoned up by a sorcerer in the 1960s, and turned to stone when it was first struck by daylight.

Information Checks

- **DC 25:** Whenever there's even a partial solar eclipse, a ritual must be performed or the troll returns to life, immune to sunlight from that day forward.

Tudor's Guides for other American Cities

Focusing on cities with higher-than-normal levels of masked activities, Tudor's Guides are your gateway to exciting vacations of hero-spotting and adventure. Pick up any of these guides in our book store in Angel's Harbor, or anywhere fine travel guides are sold.

East Coast (North to South)

- New Amsterdam (Amsterdam City, York Island, Kings, The Battery, Midland Park)
- Independence City
- Charlesboro
- Fort Sun
- Madrid City

Midlands (by Population, Largest to Smallest)

- Carnegie City
- Steelport
- Ft. Alamo
- New Cairo (on the shores of Pyramid Lake)
- Monument City

West Coast (North to South)

- Pacifica
- Los Missios
- Mercedes
- Del Horn
- Santa Christi

Emperor of the Swords



Part I

Words & Art by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Cartography by Kory M. Kaese of [Mystic Station Designs, LLC](#)

Genre: Fantasy.

Style: Baroque Adventure.

Fidelity: Low.

Theme(s): Order/Stasis vs. Chaos/Change; Faction Politics.

[Map](#)



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To unite the Tribes,

*Six Heroes were granted Swords:
Tools for war and peace.*

*Horse's Plow sparks growth.
Rooster's Comb burns enemies.
Ram's Horn sings warnings.*

*Dog's Bite strikes justly.
Boar's Tusk commands the waters.
Dragon's Wing rules all.*

*Order and Chaos,
Forged into magical blades,
Created this Realm.*

What Everybody Knows

One thousand years ago . . .

The Six Tribes (Horse, Ram, Rooster, Dog, Boar, and Dragon) formed an alliance against the much larger, brutal Tiger Tribes to the West. Six heroes from the Eastern Tribes journeyed to the volcano of Fate's Forge, to beg aid from the mysterious (and monstrous) Celestial Crow people, famed for their battle-skill and weaponsmithing. After many adventures there and back again, they returned to their peoples bearing the Swords of Power.

With the aid of these heavenly weapons, and under the leadership of the chief of the Dragon Tribe, the Six Tribes turned back the Tiger invasion and restored peace to the lands. Then, they joined together into a single Empire, ruled by their general Daring Eagle, who became the First Dragon Emperor. Under the wise rule of his house, and defended by the Swords, the Empire prospered. Each Tribe became a client kingdom under the Empire, and their kings Imperial Ministers under the Empire.

Eight hundred years ago . . .

The Tiger Tribes allied and invaded. The barbarians were beaten back by the Imperial armies, each led by a general bearing one of the Swords.

Seven hundred years ago . . .

The Dragon Empress Shining Sister put down an attempted Rooster Tribe usurpation of the Imperial Throne, using the power of Dragon's Wing to command Rooster's Comb. Simultaneously with this Rooster Coup, the Tigers invaded once more, penetrating deep into the kingdoms of Ramswood and Horsesteppe. With difficulty, the Empire pushed the barbarians out again. The treacherous Rooster King was beheaded by his own daughter, who became the new Imperial Minister and Queen of the Tribe.

Six hundred years ago . . .

The Champions of the Rooster Tribe and the Horse Tribe (Wise Teacher and Wind's Beauty, respectively) routed a Tiger warband almost single-handedly. They later married; their son, Tiger Hunter, married the Dragon Empress Jade Hairpin.

Four hundred years ago . . .

The Tigers attempted their largest invasion yet, masterminded by their High Chief: a strategic and tactical genius named Fiery Tongue. Indeed, this time, they also came by water, landing hundreds of war-bands along the coasts of the Empire which combined into three small -- but nimble and ferocious -- warbands. The four armies of the Tigers stabbed deep into the Empire's heart, and were only defeated on the shores of the Inner Sea. Chained before the Dragon Emperor, Fiery Tongue awaited judgment. What followed was the greatest catastrophe the Empire of the East has ever known.

Tragedy: The signs and portents were clear, as were the interpretations of the priest-diviners: mercy should be shown to Fiery Tongue and the surviving Tigers, and their Tribe should become part of the Empire. This was Destiny, mandated by the heavens. (Indeed, Imperial scholars believe that in all of recorded history, this was the optimum time for the Tiger Tribe to join the other Six. Fiery Tongue had the intelligence to respond to such an offer, the personality to convince the other Tigers, and a cleared field of the rival Tiger Chiefs who would have resisted such an idea. Furthermore, in light of the events that followed, it is obvious that the next occupant of the Dragon Throne had the strength of resolve to make integration work.)

Doom



Emperor Devoted to the Moon chafed at this; after all, these barbarians had slaughtered entire villages of his people, murdered helpless and elderly country nobles in their own palaces, and burned many forests and fields of all Six Tribes. As he stood before the Tiger, weighing all this, a wounded soldier stumbled up and told the Emperor that the commander of the routing forces of the Imperial Army -- his wife, the beloved Princess Garland Crown -- lay dead with the arrow of a retreating Tiger in her throat.

Filled with wrath, he drew Dragon's Wing, and moved towards Fiery Tongue. His son, Prince Devoted to the Winds, tried to stop him, but was knocked aside with ease. Devoted to the Moon raised the quivering Sword high; Fiery Tongue spat one last word of defiance; the Dragon's Blade swung down.

*Despite the omens,
And his weapon's resistance,
He struck. Disaster.*

Lightning flashed and thunder pealed from a clear blue sky. The mountains screamed and the sun hid its face behind a cataclysmic storm that appeared out of nowhere. Struck by heaven's fury for his hubris, Devoted to the Moon died in agony. Dragon's Wing shattered, and its shards whirled along hurricane winds to injure, cripple, and kill hundreds -- Imperial and barbarian alike. Although close enough to hear Fiery Tongue's dying curse (which he never revealed), the Prince survived -- wounded and missing an eye.

Reconstruction: It took decades for the One-Eyed Emperor to repair the damage done that day by war and sin. Even lacking Dragon's Wing, he was a force to be reckoned with. He emptied the Dragon Tribe's treasuries to rebuild; he instituted new trade and tax agreements to get food to starving subjects; he founded the Imperial University; he created the Imperial Scouts to reconnoiter the Empire's boundaries; he demanded the creation of what would become known as the Dragon Pearls (see below).

But his crowning achievement was the establishment of the modern form of the Imperial Court. Without that institution, and lacking a Sword of Power, the Dragon Tribe may have lost the Throne. By the development of fosterage arrangements between the Dragon Tribe and the other five Tribes of the East, he enabled closer alliances and empathies between the Swordless Throne and the kingdoms. By making himself available daily when in residence for commerce, administration, arbitration, and sport, he drew all eyes to Dragon Isle; by requiring Imperial Ministers and other high nobles to attend Court for several months a year, he drew those most dangerous to him close, where they could be evaluated, cajoled, convinced, bribed, or eliminated. He also altered the functioning of the Ministries -- now the Emperor himself appointed four of the Tribal Ministers of each Ministry, who had to -- by edict -- be commoners. This way, the influence of the aristocracy on the overall functioning of the Empire could be blunted, the Empire lifted poor peasants from the muck and offered them power and prestige (which the Empire could snatch away at any time),

and the Ministry of Intelligence gained that many more cracks in the bureaucracy to peer through.

The system worked beautifully: coups and rebellions got sniffed out and snuffed out before they could ready themselves, border skirmishes and Tiger incursions were stopped, Imperial power threaded through every aspect of day-to-day life. Inarguably, it worked: people were happier, safer, better educated, better fed, and better able to influence local and nationwide matters. Fresh blood and vigor entered into the Ministries. Advances were made in all aspects of society. The Empire thrived

One hundred and fifty years ago . . .

The Imperial system began to work too well. Over the centuries, it had begun shifting from a well-oiled machine into an overbearing control of thought and deed. The Ministerial gears started to grind against one another, as their agendas clashed. Court politics became dangerous and bloody.

The publication of *The Leaves of Jade and Iron* by Dragon Empress Wandering Star formalized Imperial law, fixing it into a rigid structure. The primary rule under the Empire is that all people of lower rank than the Emperor or Empress are equal in the eyes of the law. The "Leaves of Jade" are those laws which reward those who follow them: tax incentives, improved standing, obeying the commands of one's superiors. The "Leaves of Iron" are the severe and often physical punishments meted out to those who break laws: beatings, whippings, amputation, execution.

This system has led to increased formality across the board, adherence to traditions and traditional manners of thought, and the overall avoidance of risk. Fewer and fewer new songs are sung; fewer and fewer new trading routes open; fewer and fewer new fields are plowed. In a word: stagnation.

Fifty years ago . . .

A small army of Tigers invaded the Empire again, once more through Roosterland. While eventually defeated by the combined Imperial military, for a time, the warriors of the Rooster Tribe -- and later, those of the Horse Tribe -- once again tasted the thrill of risk and the call to heroism as they held the barbarians at bay, back-to-back. The aristocrats of both tribes have been insufferable ever since.

Five years ago . . .

Five years ago, the inattentive Empress Galloping Joy died and her son, Lithe Snake, ascended to the Dragon Throne, where he yet remains. He is an incredibly severe man, but fair. He rewards fealty with love, valor with honor, and disloyalty with vengeance. His justice is untainted by mercy. The half-decade of his stern rule has seen a complete shake-up of court politics; older courtiers pine for the reign of his mother.

Today . . .

The nobles of the Dragon Court play a dangerous game with the Emperor to advance their personal and factional goals. Going too far -- with flattery, assignations, bribery of low bureaucrats, dishonorable dueling, prevarications, untimely truth-speaking, or other crimes -- means disgrace, exile, or death. Skulduggery, backstabbing, blackmail, and frame-jobs are all running rife.

Imperial Magic, Rites, & Ministries

The Three Forces

Mages or *magicians* are the most adept at manipulating of the Three Forces: Order, Chaos, and Balance. Using their own personal energy, they can add one of the Forces to a situation, target, item, or victim. *Order* includes sorting, categorizing, strengthening, preserving, regulating, calming, tidying, and commanding things. *Chaos* includes moving,

confusing, mixing, diverting, freeing, resisting, transforming, and changing things. *Balance* includes perceiving, evaluating, steadying, matching, comparing, considering, calculating, and reviewing things. Each Tribe is associated with a Force; mages of those tribes tend to be more proficient with magic involving that Force.

So, for a magician to make a river overflow its banks, he could channel Order at it to regulate its flow, then release the spell (like making a toy dam, and then yanking it away), or he could channel Chaos at it, to whip it up into a frenzy (like poking a bear in a cage with a stick until it breaks free).

Since influencing the Forces relies on a mage's personal energy, only small effects can be wrought magically. However, the Forces can be used in tandem with the Elements or the Totem Spirits of the Cycle (see below) to gain more energy or to generate a specific, nuanced effect with a spell or enchanted item, but this is not necessary.

The Six Elements

Priests or *shamans* are the most adept at understanding and influencing the mystic aspects of the Six Elements: Earth, Wood, Fire, Metal, Water, and Wind/Spirit. Each Tribe is associated with an Element, and the totem animal type, color, Ministry, qualities, and "things known for" all provide the portfolio of what the Element can affect. Priests of a Tribe tend to be more proficient with mystical affects involving its associated Element.

The Element of Wind/Spirit is of special note, because of the way that priest perform their skills. Basically, *everything* has a spirit -- rocks, trees, clouds, fire, people, axes, whatever. Priests know the rites associated with particular Elements, which encapsulate the proper and polite ways of interacting with the spirits under the Element's aegis. Priests can cajole, appease, argue, bargain, and communicate with spirits, using these specific rituals.

The most powerful spirit is the Element of Wind, followed by (in rough order) the other Elements, the Tribal Totems, the ghosts of people, the ghosts of animals, the ghosts of plants, the ghosts of unliving things (rocks, swords, doors, etc.).

The Swords of Power

All of the Swords provide the following benefits to their wielders: improved combat skill; the ability to block, parry, dispel, or otherwise physically affect the Forces, the Elements, and spirits (this includes the ability to see and communicate with spirits as if they were priests or shamans); and the ability to mentally speak with other Sword-bearers. (Before Dragon's Wing was shattered, this communication could happen anywhere, anytime, even on the move. Unfortunately, its loss has limited the ability to "far-speak" and "far-hear" unless both bearers are each standing motionless in a high place.)

The Swords themselves are *nearly* unbreakable. They will only serve bearers who are worthy in the Sword's estimation, based on its Tribal characteristics (an individual who the Rooster's Comb finds worthy may be considered unworthy by the Dog's Bite). In the hands of an unsuitable individual, a Sword is simply a very sharp, well-made sword. In the hands of an unworthy individual, the Sword is a curse, that will seek to thwart its wielder at every opportunity. In the hands of a worthy individual, the Swords are potent artifacts.

Each Sword has some specific, unique abilities:

Horse's Plow: When the blade is stabbed into the ground, the wielder can cause earthquakes and fissures to open up underfoot, moving in any direction he commands, and can speed the natural growth of plants or animals within line of sight with no harm, at a rate of one week per second. Additionally, the Sword-

The Celestial Cycle

Given the association of Elements and Tribes, one idea that can be incorporated into this setting is that of the *Celestial Cycle*, where one Element/Tribe conquers another in the natural order. The Horse is replaced by Ram, who is replaced in turn by Dog; Metal is replaced by Fire, which is itself replaced by Water, and so forth. This can be applied to the reign of Emperors (if one wants to get away from a thousand years of draconic rule; the Dog Emperor succeeds the Ram Empress, etc.), superiority of fighting styles (for that wushu flavor), political faction conflicts, or how to counter magical spells or the powers of spirits.

bearer can run with the speed of a horse for days without tiring. When held, the Sword-bearer cannot feel anger.

Rooster's Comb: When the blade is brandished in the air, the wielder can cause the Sword to burst into intense flames, which can light anything flammable in seconds; extinguish fires with a sweep of the blade; or inspire confidence in all friends, and fear in all enemies, who are within sight of it. When held, the Sword-bearer cannot feel fear or suffer injury from flame.

Ram's Horn: If great danger or deadly enemies threaten the wielder (or those under his specifically-stated protection), the Sword begins to hum in a low tone; the Sword-bearer can command the Sword to sing audible to all or just to him silently.. Directionality and distance of hazards can be determined with some practice. Additionally, the wielder can carve upon or through living wood without injuring it (permitting a topiary effect), command wood to move at his whim (includes the repulsion of arrow shafts), and slice through dead wood with no effort. When held, the Sword-bearer cannot feel despair.

Dog's Bite: When the Sword is pointed at something metal, the wielder can exercise command over it -- opening locks, blunting sharp edges, magnetizing needles for compasses, etc. By swinging the blade in the air at the scene or in the presence of a victim of a crime, the wielder can make the weapon sound a ringing chime, which paralyzes the unjust individual or entity for a short time, and can lead the wielder directly towards the criminal. Furthermore, the flat of the blade can assuage the injuries of a victim of injustice, be they physical, mental, emotional, or social -- e.g., it can strike a liar dumb, and then cause any lies told against the victim to fade away from conscious memory. When held, the Sword-bearer automatically knows if he's being lied to, but cannot lie himself. (Note that if the wielder ever acts unjustly himself, the Sword will kill him. It's happened twice in history.)

Boar's Tusk: When the blade is stabbed into a body of water, the wielder can stir up or quell waves, tides, and currents. When the Sword is brandished, the wielder can summon or banish rain and storms. If the blade is pointed at a target during a storm, the wielder can cause a lightning bolt to strike the target (1 bolt per hour). When held, the Sword-bearer cannot feel sadness or drown.

Dragon's Wing: The wielder of this Sword is nearly always initially seen as "polite" by the denizens of the spirit world (he should still know the proper and polite rituals to be truly effective, however). He can command the winds to blow or stop. When brandished, the wielder cannot be ignored; when sheathed with intent, he will not be noticed, even by the sharpest-eyed guard. When held, the Sword-bearer can "ride the winds" -- i.e., fly.

Before it was shattered, the wielder of this Sword could command the other Swords of Power in the absence of their wielders' orders; if the bearer of Dragon's Wing and the target Sword's wielder had a conflict of desires, the holder of Dragon's Wing could "turn off" the other Sword's unique abilities with concentration.

The Imperial Ministries

Each Imperial Ministry is charged with the smooth functioning of an aspect of the Empire. They are bureaucracies, with administrative centers in each

1. Horse (Earth)
2. Ram (Wood)
3. Dog (Metal)
4. Rooster (Fire)
5. Boar (Water)
6. Back to #1.

In this Campaign in a Box, the Dragon Tribe and its Element of Wind/Spirit is above the Cycle. If one wishes to add the Dragons into the Cycle, an appropriate position will have to be found; placing Dragon (Wind/Spirit) after Boar and before Horse seems appropriate. If the Tiger Tribe ever becomes part of the Empire, the GM will have to determine where it -- and its associated Element of Blood -- fits in as well.

Here's a quick and dirty way to apply the Cycle to fighting styles in two game systems: the Tribe/Element gains a bonus (an Upshift in **PDQ**, or a +3 in **GURPS**) to all combat actions - - attack and defense -- against the Tribe/Element it supplants in the Cycle. GMs who want woo-woo-wuxia levels of fun can even permit the mixing and matching of Tribe and Element to generate particular moves; stacking bonuses is up to their discretion.

Therefore, at the basic level, a Rooster-style warrior has a bonus against a Dog-style warrior, but is at a disadvantage against a Boar-style warrior. At the woo-woo-wuxia level, a warrior's Horse-style "Flaming Gallop" strike would be at a significant bonus (2 Upshifts or +6) to penetrate another warrior's Ram-style "Fan of Falling Leaves" defense (Fire vs. Wood; Horse vs. Ram). A martial artist's Boar-style "Earth Rooting" defense would have a bonus against both Water-style

kingdom, and a main palace on Dragon Isle. The chain of command in a Ministry starts with the Imperial Minister, who has six Tribal Ministers, each of whom has at least three Secretaries, who each have any number of Undersecretaries and Bureaucrats (First through Third Class).

The Ministries either handle problems exceedingly quickly, or not at all. The efficiency or entanglement of each Ministerial bureaucracy depends upon the Tribal associations of involved parties and issues, current relationships with other kingdoms and the Throne, current graft and bribery levels, the omens of the day, personal relationships and stakes, and a host of other concerns. There is much politicking and backroom deal-making to handle the red tape issues. In general, the system works well enough, unless someone specifically doesn't want it to.

Since the days of the One-Eyed Emperor, four of the six Tribal Ministers in a Ministry *must* be of peasant stock; furthermore, any Imperial citizen can join the bureaucracy by passing two tests: a basic civil-service exam, and a comprehensive quiz on the specific field of the Ministry. Bureaucrats are social "professionals" and enjoy both limited authority and a mild increase in status. A bureaucrat of common birth is higher status than other peasants, but not equal to aristocrats; nobles who become bureaucrats are more respected than their peers, but not as much as the Tribal Kings. Note that even in a small town, the Bureaucrat First Class of Sewage and Trash Removal can be a powerful individual.

The machinations of the Ministries, working in tandem or against one another, provides a lot of interesting factional conflict. Consider the construction of a new Imperial granary; at least four Ministries must be involved: Rites to bless the site and finished building, Public Works to build it, the Arts to decorate it, and Agriculture to fill it.

The Ministry of Agriculture: Responsible for policies regarding farmers, herders, and breeders; setting market prices, providing subsidies, logistics in wartime, and stocking the Imperial granaries.

The Ministry of the Arts: Provides basic subsistence and housing to artists, awards grants and contracts for Empire-commissioned artwork, censors seditious artworks, publishes books.

The Ministry of Education: Administers the Imperial University and civil-service exams.

The Ministry of Intelligence: Responsible for the Imperial Scouts, coordination of all information across Imperial Service, and liaises with other Ministries as necessary (when curious events or persons of interest are detected).

The Ministry of Justice: Provides cities with magistrates, judges, and executioners; serves as a police force; imprisons or executes criminals; provides relief for victims of crime or disaster; establishes standard weights and measures; and investigates wrongdoing in other Ministries.

The Ministry of Public Works: Surveys land, establishes zoning, draws up blueprints, administers construction of public and private edifices, builds roads, maintains sewers and aqueducts, and stockpiles raw materials (coal, ore, firewood).

The Ministry of Revenues: Establishes the tax code, collects taxes, administers the Imperial Treasury and Imperial Mint, provides customs agents, regulates banks and moneylenders, and balances the cash flow between Ministries.

The Ministry of Rites: Educates priests in proper ritual and diplomacy, consecrates priests, casts fortunes, interprets

and Rooster-style attacks (Earth vs. Water; Boar vs. Rooster); but would be vulnerable to Horse-style and Wood-style attacks -- and one that combined both, like a Horse-style "Forest of Hooves" would get the stacked bonus *against* him.

Lesson? "Know thy enemy."

As written, Dragons and Tigers are outside of the Cycle. This can mean that while they suffer no strengths against certain forms, they also suffer no weakness against others. (Alternately, these Tribes/Elements gain bonuses against all other styles, except the other. This would make Dragons and Tigers incredibly formidable.)

Lastly, this system of strengths and weaknesses against other Tribes/Elements doesn't just have to be limited to physical conflict -- think of the applications to social interaction, commerce, factional politics, bureaucracy . . . The possibilities are endless.

omens, liaises with spirits of all types.

The Ministry of War: Trains (and deploys, in wartime) the Imperial Army and Navy; constructs tactical and strategic goals for the Empire; liaises with Agriculture, Intelligence, Justice, and Public Works; and serves as a fire brigade in Imperial settlements.

The Six Tribes

Each of the Six Tribes of the Empire have certain practical and mystical associations, detailed below. Note that these are fairly loose traits (and looser for the peasantry rather than the aristocracy) and are descriptive rather than prescriptive (e.g., a member of the Horse Tribe *can* wear the color red, be an Order or Chaos mage, serve in the Ministry of Arts, be jolly and proud, or all of these at once). The lists below are just the stereotypes other Imperial subjects think of when someone says, "A Horse-man, Rooster-man, and Boar-man walk into a tavern. . ."

Tribal Identity: All Imperial citizens nominally belong to a Tribe. Birth location is unimportant under tradition; for example, there are Roosters who were born in the Hound's Highlands. However, as noted above, tribal identity and characteristics are more important to the noble families rather than peasant ones, and more important for those who live in the homeland than in other kingdoms. Furthermore, while the Empire is united under one spoken language and written syllabary, each Tribe/kingdom has a noticeable accent due to subtle differences in dialect.

Many marriages among the aristocracy are between Tribes, to encourage alliances; most peasant marriages are within the Tribe. When people marry, part of the rite involves one of the couple formally joining their spouse's Tribe; legally, it doesn't matter whether the husband joins the wife's Tribe or vice-versa. Different regions (even within kingdoms) and certain aristocrat families have their own customs. Children start out life belonging to the Tribe of their mother. At age 13, they are permitted to keep this association, or may change their affiliation to the former Tribe of the parent who switched; this is technically permissible, but usually looked down upon in society except in cases of abuse. If they marry later in life, they may then join their spouse's Tribe.

Peasantry & Aristocracy: It's usually harder to change social classes than it is to change Tribes. A peasant is a peasant and an aristocrat is an aristocrat, period. There are occasional exceptions -- exceptional display of the positive characteristic (see below) of the Tribe -- loyalty in Dog peasants, artistic skill in Ram peasants, a fantastic sense of humor in a Boar peasant, etc. -- can lead to ennoblement. However, even rarer is disenfranchisement; an individual would have to display the negative characteristic (see below) to an extremely criminal level to have their titles stripped.

Leadership: The tribal *King* -- or *Queen*; one of the cornerstones of the Empire is sexual equality -- is the leader of the Tribe's Chieftains, rules the tribal nation, serves as the Minister for an Imperial department, and is the bearer of one of the Swords of Power. In all four regards, he or she is responsible to the Emperor or Empress (who is also the King of the Dragon Tribe). If necessary, a Tribe may have a *Champion*, who wields the Sword and leads the kingdom's armies in the stead of a royal who otherwise cannot.

Totem Spirit: Each of the Tribes has a Totem animal spirit, which is active in the world. This powerful entity definitely has a personality (matching the characteristics, alliances, and enmities the Tribe is known for), and may impose upon its "children" general or specific taboos, helpful talents or affinities, or provide dreamquests and visions at its whim.

Horse Tribe

Element: Earth

Force: Balance

Color: Yellow

Kingdom: Horsteppe

Imperial Ministry: Agriculture

Positive Quality: Sociable

Negative Quality: Competitive

Horse

Known For: Farming, cavalry, healers, grains, beef

Allied Tribes: Rooster, Dog, Dragon

Rival Tribes: Ram, Boar



Ram Tribe

Element: Wood

Force: Order

Color: Green

Kingdom: Ramswood

Imperial Ministry: the Arts

Positive Quality: Creative

Negative Quality: Stubborn

Known For: Artists, archers, carpentry, fruits

Allied Tribes: Rooster, Boar, Dragon

Rival Tribes: Horse, Dog

Ram



Rooster Tribe

Element: Fire

Force: Chaos

Color: Red

Kingdom: Roosterland

Imperial Ministry: War

Positive Quality: Confident

Negative Quality: Proud

Known For: Warriors, masons, coffee, and tea

Allied Tribes: Horse, Ram, Dragon

Rival Tribes: Dog, Boar

Rooster



Dog Tribe

Element: Metal
Force: Order
Color: Silver
Kingdom: Hound's Highlands
Imperial Ministry: Justice
Positive Quality: Loyal
Negative Quality: Staid
Known For: Smiths, judges, magistrates, ores
Allied Tribes: Horse, Boar, Dragon
Rival Tribes: Ram, Rooster

Dog



Boar Tribe

Element: Water
Force: Chaos
Color: Blue
Kingdom: Boar Coast
Imperial Ministry: Public Works
Positive Quality: Jolly
Negative Quality: Lazy
Known For: Sailors, shipwrights, commerce, fish, salt, oil
Allied Tribes: Ram, Dog, Dragon
Rival Tribes: Horse, Rooster

Boar



Dragon Tribe

Elements: Wind, Spirits
Force: Order
Color: Gold
Kingdom: Dragon Isle
Imperial Ministries: 1) Education; 2) Rites; 3) Revenues; and 4) Intelligence.
Positive Quality: Inspired
Negative Quality: Ostentatious
Known For: Priests, Imperial officials, spices, dyes, wines
Allied Tribes: All.
Rival Tribes: None.

Dragon



The Tiger Tribe(s)

The Tiger Tribe should be more properly called "the Tiger Tribes," since they originated as a collection of smaller groups, called *sub-Tribes*; however, they have acculturated somewhat over the centuries under the dominance of the original Tiger Tribe. In any case, it's doubtful that most Imperial citizens know anything about barbarian ethnology (some Imperial scholars *may* know some of the absorbed Tribe names: Hare, Snake, Ox, Fox, Coyote, Bison, Eagle, Spider, Frog, etc.), though Tiger Tribesmen are keen on their lineages. (It's the GM's call whether or not a Tiger character draws on just their sub-Tribe's Totem animal, or both the Tiger Totem *and* their sub-

Tribal Totem; the latter would make Tiger shamans quite powerful compared to Imperial priests.)

The Tigers are a nomadic people who live to the west of the Empire, and practice hunting, foraging (regionally and seasonally), herding (bison, horses, and goats, moving seasonally), opportunistic horticulture, and raiding and looting of Imperial border villages. A sub-Tribe is a highly-mobile group, living in conical tents when on the plains and in cliff-dwellings when based in mountain valleys or lowland canyons. They speak a different language than the Empire, and have only a rudimentary, ideographic method of writing.

While relations are generally tense between the Empire and the Tiger Tribes, there is some trade and diplomacy. However, any foreign group traveling in the other's lands will be scrutinized, and subject to prejudices (and possibly even ill-treatment). Still, there is plenty of wealth to be had exchanging civilized luxuries for barbarian rarities, so commerce continues.

Tiger

Tiger Tribe

Element: Blood

Force: Chaos

Color: Rust-orange

Kingdom: Western barbarians

Imperial Ministry: n/a

Positive Quality: Strong

Negative Quality: Rash

Known For: Physical strength and endurance, ferocity, warriors, furs, ivory

Allied Tribes: Other barbarians

Rival Tribes: Other barbarians



The Element of Blood

The Element of Blood represents life and death, strength and weakness, health and disease, anger and sadness. Many Tigers make blood sacrifices as part of their heathen rites; while Imperial storytellers go on and on about barbaric human sacrifice on captured Imperial soldiers, a Tiger only sacrifices his own blood to appease the spirits. Interestingly, the blood of livestock that a person owns counts as *their* blood; however, this understanding does not extend to cover borrowed or rented livestock, owned slaves, family relatives, children before they perform the Rite of Adulthood, or captives taken in battle. Still, many of the "criminals" of the Tiger Tribe are individuals who interpret blood-ownership as including these groups.

Celestial Crow Tribe

The Celestial Crow Tribe is a mystery; some say that they have all died out, or have ascended to the heavens, or even - they whisper -- never existed at all.

Not much is known about them, and all is tainted by legend. They are said to be humanoid (but not human), with bone white hair, eyes like solid ebony beads, long noses, and reddish skin. Celestial Crows wear elaborate feathered cloaks over their other clothing -- which may either be rich or poor, depending upon the individual. They live close to the heavens: on the tops of mountains -- especially volcanoes -- and tall trees, in both the Empire and the Tiger Tribelands. At turns, Celestial Crows are both generous and vengeful: rewarding the pious, the respectful, the self-sacrificing, and the humble, and punishing the blasphemer, the disrespectful, the greedy, and the arrogant.

They are said to be masters of magic, illusion, war, and smithcraft. Many youths seeking to study at a Celestial Crow's feet climb the tallest mountain they can, bearing gifts of dried fruits, nuts, and vegetables. The few who return are

inarguably changed by the experience (not always for the better), and many refuse to speak of it to anyone.

Tribal Interaction Matrix

	Horse	Ram	Rooster	Dog	Boar	Dragon
Horse		-	+	+	-	+
Ram	-		+	-	+	+
Rooster	+	+		-	-	+
Dog	+	-	-		+	+
Boar	-	+	-	+		+
Dragon	+	+	+	+	+	

Table Legend

- + Ally
- Rival

* * *

To Be Continued Next Week . . .

* * *

Special thanks to Andrew Byers.

Captain Venture and Broken Arrow Company

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Eric Funk

Author's Note: This article describes a small mercenary/special ops company in a modern setting where magic, psionics, and/or meta-abilities are known to exist, not unlike **Infinite Worlds**, **International Super Teams**, or **GURPS Technomancer**. With minimal work, it can also be adapted to a fantasy or futuristic setting.

* * *

"If it was known where lightning was going to strike, there would be a line of people waiting to be there."

--Military Minds, Captain Ilyana Venture

As a young Lieutenant, Ilyana Venture was traumatized when she witnessed her brother's death. It happened during a joint operation with her brother's unit, when he confronted an apparent noncombatant in a white evening dress. The stranger laughed as she spun on him and he doubled over in pain! Ilyana was watching through a scope, and to her horror her shots all curved away! As his life was slowly being sucked out, the lieutenant called for backup, and charged with a knife. An invisible force picked her up and threw her against a wall. Her brother's screams accompanied her into unconsciousness . . . It was later revealed that the mage was a dropout from their organization!

While recovering from the spinal injury in a hospital, she dove into books, studying discipline and training. It was during this time that she discovered her talent for writing. She requested to be transferred from field service to boot camp to lower the number of dropouts leaving with disciplined powers. She still takes to the field (as her Bad Back allows) whenever her brother's killer may be encountered. Since then, she has molded herself into an efficient military machine to harden and enforce discipline in her troops, particularly those with powers they can take with them when they leave the unit. To this day, she distrusts anyone with a meta-power (magic, psionics, or the like), especially those suspected of possessing the [Wrong Stuff](#).

"Discipline is the beginning of an organized mind. Even so, it must still be able to choose to engage in random patterns from time to time in order to survive."

--"The Mind is a Harsh Master," Captain Ilyana Venture

In Mixed Company

Holding the rank of Captain in an "army," Ilyana Venture is in command of 10 to 50 troops (as the GM sees fit, see Rank 4, p. SO49). That means that the company consists of anywhere from two to 12 groups, each made up of four to five individuals, such as the PCs. Whether the adventurers are part of the front-line team or the "B" team is up to the GM. Whether Broken Arrow company is part of an official military, or just a mercenary group, the "work week" consists of a few missions breaking up lots of training! Recruits could be practically any sort of mixed meta-humans, be they mages, supers, gadgeteers, psionicists, shapeshifters, spirits, or even super-normals!

What does it mean to be a Meta-human in Captain Venture's company? New recruits must prove themselves before they receive any but the basic equipment and training to aid them in exploring their meta-powers. The [weirder](#) the power, the more trust is required. Meta-humans will have to work hard (at least enough through roleplaying to *earn* a +1 Reputation to offset the Stigma, not necessarily to pay for it in character points). It means at least one extra hour of training every day, be it calisthenics, martial arts, history, chess, or some other "productive" discipline. In addition to all this, they will be given the most difficult portions of a mission!

"It you wait until you think you are completely ready before trying for the first time, you many not be able to discover your hidden potential."

--"Broadening the Senses," Captain Ilyana Venture

Adventure Seeds

Mercenary Introduction: The adventurers are approached by a man who seems to know somewhat more about their capabilities than the public does. In exchange for favors, equipment, training, he asks for a minimum tour of duty. The tour of the boot camp could be as draconian as a prison camp, or as loose as Police Academy or **GURPS IOU** . . .

Buddy System Training may also include (as an experiment, already in place, or a permanent change) a "buddy" system, where new recruits are teamed up with a veteran troop with similar powers (theoretically).

- *Green PCs:* Under the watch of veterans, the heroes must try to puzzle out missions and save the older soldiers from clues and dangers they cannot perceive. They may have to break curfew and disobey orders to get to the Truth -- which can redeem them if they're right, **and** if they can get credit for it by getting it properly up the chain of command in time.
- Continuing the above seed, as graduation day approaches, some teachers may finally realize that their protégés are better suited for their jobs, and may become rivals who know the PCs' weaknesses. Attempts to mislead practice for or direct sabotage to the final tests (academic and athletic) may be fair game.
- *Veteran PCs:* So you have survived the enemy, but can you survive your allies? Your trainee's progression reflects on you -- so teach them well! They may be Klutzes, Jinxed, poor marksmen, and using Cheap equipment, but they are still your responsibility! If the new recruits cause trouble or fall short of their marks, the whole team may be punished with extra disciplinary training!

Once "Inside": Once on the inside, then one might realize that there are forces "inside" that are trying to harm or kill the Captain. In light games, they are misguided individuals who were hurt by the captain's strong, but well-meaning, hand. In darker games, it could be part of an Illuminati-style conspiracy, where no one can be trusted, or simply another officer trying to take her job "the old fashioned way" . . .

The Race: Two squads are given the challenge to be the first to complete a mission while staying stealthy. The winner gets extra R&R/funding/benefits/parade/next choice in missions (or whatever the PCs go for). As a complication, a team from a rival organization might also be trying to accomplish a mission in the same area, but with a different goal. The adventurers must avoid them. Interfering with them and failing costs points, but accomplishing both goals untraceably wins points . . .

Broken Arrows?: Equipment is sabotaged or goes missing . . .

- During training
- During a real mission
- During a covert mission

Is it the work of a force outside the company, or within? Are some of the green troops getting fed up with the substandard equipment and are trying to make a point, or is it something more sinister?

Protection Ticket: The objective is to run interference for a politician whose staff has received credible/forecasted threats to their person. The GM could provide maps (see links at the end), and allow the players to plan strategy, and prepare for contingencies. (Although a fair GM should plan first, independent of the PCs . . .) All is boring, until suddenly a small group of (or solitary) aliens, vampires, ghosts, goblins, super-henchmen, or something similar attack, and are barely fended off. The group must decide whether to track it to its source, shore up defenses around the VIP, or bring them somewhere safe. Meanwhile, the politician really wants to go campaigning, shake hands, make public speeches, attend meetings, and/or visit family and will not stand for any curbing of his agenda, despite warnings and threats against their life . . .

- As above, but the more interruptive the PCs are, the more impatient and disappointed the client will become. If, however, their actions raise "approval ratings," then they might find the contract extended. (Here is a chance for a charismatic character to talk to the press . . .)
- Extra Paranoia: The enemies seem to know what your orders and plans are and/or seem to follow your radio chatter.

Rubber Ducky, You're Not the One . . . : The party is given the mission of physically breaking into a [wizard's manor/tower](#) and replacing his(or her) rubber duck with one provided. The use of any effects that fold space are forbidden, be they psionics, magic spells, or meta-powers -- any such usage can be traced and will set off alarms. The group is given one-shot amulets/charms that (apparently) can hide them from retroactive scrying. For extra paranoia, the amulets don't register as magical.

One of the Group: Once the adventuring party has earned the trust of Captain Venture, they are approached by her most trusted lieutenant. They are given a sensitive mission: investigate a man that the captain has been having lunch with. (This fact may not be divulged, but discovered).

As it turns out . . .

- He has secret meta-powers!
- He is a super villain in disguise?
- He *was* a villain but *may* go honest . . .
- He is a spy for a rival within the company
- As above, but as an external spy . . .
- He plans to simply deceive her and steal money, fame, and/or access to escape the country . . .

Brownie Points: If someone were to take out the killer, they would gain the respect of Captain Venture. If the killer was to be captured for trial instead, the heroes would gain Ilyana's eternal gratitude. The latter would also allow her the closure she needs to heal.

It sure is lonely . . . : The Captain normally mixes with the troops on a regular basis, but lately has been acting a bit reclusive. Those who have seen her or her lieutenants report them acting strange . . . And then in the middle of the night, the camp is under attack! The command personnel are the first to be killed/MiA. Who will take command when the smoke clears? Alternately, her Intolerance could grow in severity to the point of persecution. Someone has to do something!

Patrons and Duty

As a patron to green troops, Captain Venture is (Powerful Individual [10], Regular Equipment, Minimal Intervention, 6 or less) [5].

Once on the "inside," the equipment level increases to "Powerful," the "Minimal Intervention" limitation is removed, and change frequency to "9 or less". [20]

As a Patron, the company as it is described here is "Powerful Organization, Enhanced Equipment" [30].

Each of the above comes with a Duty (hazardous, 15 or less) [-20].

"It is easy to say 'I've read Brannigan's Big Book of War.' It's another thing entirely to know strategies to the point that you see them in others' actions before they do."

--*Horizon of the Learning Curve*, Captain Ilyana Venture

Captain Ilyana Venture

232 points

Human female; Apparent Age: late 30s to early 40s*; Wt ~160 lbs*; Ht ~5'7"*; Dark red hair in crew cut.

*Insufficient Clearance to Access Data

ST 10 [0]

DX 11 [20]

IQ 13 [60]

HT 11 [10].

SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 11 [2]

Will 14 [5]; Per 14 [5]; FP 10 [-3]

Basic Speed 6 [10]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Block 10* [0]; Dodge 10* [0]; Parry 10* (Judo) [0].

*Does not include DB from shield

Advantages:

Ally Group (50%, 10 persons) [12]

Charisma +3 [15]

Combat Reflexes [15]

Common Sense [10]

Contact Group (Military

12 or less

Skill 12, Usually Reliable) [20]

Honest Face [1]

Military Rank 4 [20]

Patron (Powerful Group, Powerful Equipment

9 or less) [40]

Reputation +3 (Author of a successful book; Small Group; 12 or less) [5]

Security Clearance [10]

Talent: Smooth Operator +1 [15]

Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages:

Bad Back [-15]

Bad Sight (Correctable) [-10]

Debt 5 [-5]

Delusion ("I have no Intolerance") [-5]

Duty (Patron, Hazardous, 15 or less) [-20]

Enemies (Competitors, Rivals, 6 or less) [-5]

Fanaticism (Company) [-15]

Flashbacks [-5]

Intolerance (Those with meta-abilities) [-5]

Night Blindness [-10]

Nightmares (12) [-5]

Sense of Duty (Family) [-5]

Stubbornness [-5]

Workaholic [-5].

Quirks:

Careful

Likes to lead troops in person

Nosy

Polite

Speaks enigmatically when giving personal advice [-5].

Skills:

Accounting/TL8-11 (IQ-2, H) [1]
Acting-14** (IQ+1, A) [2]
Administration-13 (IQ+0, A) [2]
Area Knowledge (City)-13 (IQ, E) [1]
Area Knowledge (Region)-13 (IQ, E) [1]
Body Language-13 (Per-1, A) [1]
Computer Operation/TL8-13 (IQ, E) [1]
Detect Lies-14** (Per+0, A) [1]
Diplomacy-15* (IQ+2, H) [2]
Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-10 (DX, A) [1]
Electronics Operation/TL8 (Comm)-12 (IQ-1, A) [1]
Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security)-12 (IQ-1, A) [1]
Electronics Operation/TL8 (Surveillance)-12 (IQ-1, A) [1]
Enthrallment (Persuade, 9 subjects)-13 (Will-1, H) [2]
Expert Skill (Military Science)-13 (IQ+0, H) [4]
Finance/TL8-12 (IQ-1, H) [2]
First Aid/TL8-13 (IQ+0, E) [1]
Forgery /TL8 (Detection)-12/10 (IQ-2, H) [1]
Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-11 (DX+0, E) [1]
Intelligence Analysis/TL8-12 (IQ-1, H) [2]
Judo-12 (DX+0, H) [4]
Leadership-18*,** (IQ+5, A) [4]
Lip Reading-13 (Per-1, A) [1]
Literature (Military)-12/10 (IQ-2, H) [1]
Mind Block-15 (Will+1, A) [4]
Observation-13 (Per-1, A) [1]
Occultism-13 (IQ+0, A) [2]
Poisons/TL8 (Detection)-13/11 (IQ-1, A) [1]
Politics (Military)-13** (IQ+0, A) [1]
Professional Skill (Company Operation)-13 (IQ+0, A) [2]
Professional Skill (Soldier)-12 (IQ-1, A) [1]
Public Speaking-16*,** (IQ+2, A) [1]
Research/TL8-12 (IQ-1, A) [1]
Shield-12 (DX+1, E) [2]
Savoir-Faire (Military)-16*,** (IQ+2, A) [1]
Survival (Forest)-13 (Per-1, A) [1]
Tactics-13 (IQ+0, H) [4]
Teaching-14 (IQ+1, A) [4]
Traps/TL8-12 (IQ-1, A) [1]
Writing-14 (IQ+1, A) [4].

* Includes +3 for Charisma

** Includes +1 for Talent

Alternate Versions

Fantasy: Driving becomes Riding, Guns becomes Crossbow, Electronics Operation becomes Alchemy and Thaumatology, and Computer Operation/TL3 is Abacus Operation!

Future / Transhuman Space: Driving may become piloting, guns may become beam weapons, depending on the setting. What she dislikes are aliens with powers, infomorphs and humans with performance-enhancing cyber components or biomods.

In Nomine: With little or no modification, this character and company could be used as a dispatch service for a Tether. Ilyana's distrust is thus for Soldiers with Songs, as well as Saints and/or Undead.

Lost in Time: If she were to fall through a hole in time to a place where her social links and ranks are meaningless (removing Ally Group [-12], Contact Group [-20], Rank [-20], Patron [-40], Reputation [-5], Security Clearance [-10], Status [0], Wealth reduced to "Dead Broke" [-35], Debt [+5], Duty [+20], Enemies [+5], Fanaticism [+15], Sense of Duty [+5] net [-102]), her point value is reduced to 130 points, which is perfect for a beginning player character!

"Real Life": The Intolerance could easily be adjusted to be against an ethnic group, demographic, or just people with Talents.

GURPS Third Edition Conversion Notes

DX [-10], **IQ** [-30], **HP** [+3], Will [-1], Honest Face becomes Sanctity [+4]. 198 points as is; "Lost in Time" version is 96 points.

Pyramid Links

- [Dogs of War](#)" by Erick-Noel Bouchard
- ["The Hidden"](#) (A Black Ops Adventure) by Jonathan Souza
- ["Indiana Jones and . . ."](#) by Steven Marsh
- ["The Order Of Blood & Bone"](#) (Religious Interstellar Mercenaries) by Michael Anguiano
- ["Psionic Wizardry"](#) by Stephen Kenson
- ["Red Tape Triumphant"](#) by Michele Armellini
- ["Spaced Academy"](#) by Bob Portnell

Other Links

- ["Architectural Designs"](#)
- ["Office Floor Plans"](#)
- [Pyramid Brokerage Floorplans"](#)

Pyramid Review

Noir (for Mutants & Masterminds)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Christopher L. McGlothlin, M.Ed. with Sean Glenn

Cover by Eric Wright

Illustrated by Brett Barkley, Eric Wright, & Storn Cook

Cartography by Ed Bouelle

64-page b&w softcover; \$17.95

To date, the releases for [Mutants & Masterminds](#) -- the premier *d20 System* superhero RPG -- have concentrated on the four-color genre it was designed to handle. [Dan Brereton's Nocturnals: A Midnight Companion](#) has been the sole exception, employing the stripped down and rebuilt mechanics of the *d20 System* to power a brash game of Pulp horror. Although set in the here and now, the setting for *Nocturnals* had just as much the feel of the fifties and sixties. Now it is joined by a second supplement, one that explores a slightly earlier, darker period. As its title suggests *Noir* is devoted to the years between 1948 and 1958 that depicted in sharp black and white by such films as *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Big Sleep*, and *Touch of Evil*.

Thus we are on the mean streets of film noir, a place where men are real men, it is rare that a dame can be trusted, the black heart of a villain always runs deep, and everyone, without exception, has something to hide. *Noir* covers this and more, segueing into the superhero genre with what is really the Costumed Adventurer. This is not to say that such individuals cannot have actual super powers, but when they do, the powers are always weak and restricted in comparison to the four-color genre.

Yet before *Noir* reaches the heroics of the Costumed Adventurer, it sets down the basics of the genre's male and female archetypes. As tough guys, the film noir male is strong, in terms of his will, his jaw, and his name, which should always be of a non-ethnic origin. Considering the ethnic melting pot that is big city America, the tough guy will probably have changed his name to something stronger and more generic. He is also likely to be aged between 30 and 40, and invariably dresses plainly. The dame on the other hand, will have a figure to entice, the wiles to scheme, and gold-dig with the best, or the worst.

To this are added just ever-so slight elements of the superhero genre. Origins such as Alien and Mutant are left for the decades to come, while the origins that draw from strange sciences, training, magic, and miracles are still allowed, as is wealth. In practical terms, a plethora of powers are deemed inappropriate: Cosmic Power, Dimensional Travel, Flight, Space Flight, Teleportation, Time Control, Time Travel, and so on. Others are severely restricted, usually by denying the use of particular power extras, or imposing certain flaws. For example, Sorcery is allowed, but must have at least one Flaw, and so is the Incorporeal power, but it is denied the Ghost Touch and Phase Attack extras. Further, a character is allowed as many weaknesses as the GM lets him. In addition, a character also has something far worse, a "Fatal Flaw."

Without such a Fatal Flaw, a character cannot progress in game terms, that is, acquire more Power Levels. In keeping with the genre, the character cannot gain without suffering a greater loss. Such losses should be appropriate to the Fatal

Flaw, which could be anything from making bad choices and literally losing bodily parts from a fray to having innocents suffer as a result of your actions and just plain bad luck. The Fatal Flaw needs to be defined as part of the character background before the points are spent during the creation process. There might be gripes at the deleterious effects of the Fatal Flaw, but not only are they appropriate to the genre, their use is also ripe with roleplaying potential.

Like *Nocturnals*, characters in *Noir* are built at Power Level 6, as opposed to the Power Level 10 of normal four-color *Mutants & Masterminds*. Similarly, characters in both games are expected to be able to take a beating or two, an aspect emphasized by the reduced Power Level, and then again in *Noir* by the various Fatal Flaws. The shared emphasis continues with skills and feats, particularly the former, an optional rule suggesting that skills be cheaper to buy. As with the powers, *Noir* bans some feats, for example, Darkvision is pointless in setting where the shadows are by necessity, long. Others are added, such as Force of Personality and Light Sleeper, while yet more are suggested as suitable for import from both *Dan Brereton's Nocturnals* and *Crooks!*

What *Noir* makes clear that it is not, is part of the Pulp genre. Though the origins of both are similar, there are plenty of differences. The obvious being that pulp is both colorful and in color, whereas film noir is both in black and white, and literally black and white. That said, *Noir* as a supplement strays towards the pulpier end of the film noir genre, since it involves various super heroic elements and employs a set of mechanics that are themselves cinematic rather than filmic in style.

Refereeing film noir is nicely covered in an essay that deftly discusses and applies Raymond Durnat's article, "The Family Tree of *Film Noir*" to the running of the game. This is done with reference to plenty of examples, as are the additional points that the author goes on to discuss. In game terms, *Noir* is supported by its own setting, known simply as "the City." An East Coast or lakeside metropolis all ready for the GM to use, but delivered in the form of a cabbie's monologue. No statistics are provided, but given that *Noir* is for *Mutants & Masterminds*, they are easy to provide. A selection of "heroes" and villains are given as ready-to-play examples, the former either as player characters or as NPCs. Another four characters are listed in the first of the book's two appendices that are specific to the *Meta-4* setting described in the *Crooks!* supplement. The second appendix contains a very handy film noir filmography.

The gaming side of *Noir* is the weaker aspect of the supplement. Not in terms of its characters, all of which *are* useful, but in the setting material. The City as described works well enough for either a straight film noir campaign or a low super-powered variant as suggested by the supplement. Yet those readers coming to *Noir* expecting to explore the film noir versions of either the *Freedom City* or *Meta-4* settings, will be disappointed. They are certainly mentioned, and in the case of the latter setting, discussed, but it would have been great to see them further developed.

Noir is of course up to the usual production standards for a *Mutants & Masterminds* supplement. Behind the excellent cover, the book is well laid out and well written. It does need another editorial pass though, as the period is all too often missing from the end of sentences.

Overall, *Noir* gives the GM almost everything necessary to run a straight film noir game or a low power Noir supers campaign. The lack of a developed setting or application of the *Noir* genre to the two *Mutants & Masterminds* settings, does serve to make the book feel somewhat short. Nevertheless the rules are *more* than workable, and the guide to the film noir genre is as good an essay as you will find anywhere. That and the succinct filmography combine to make *Noir* an excellent introduction to the genre, one that deserves further support.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

WMD: Weapons of Mass Destruction

Published by [Flying Buffalo, Inc.](#)

Designed by Douglas Malewicki & Rick Loomis

Art by SS Crompton, John Kovalic, Aaron Williams, Brendan Fraim, & Brian Fraim

110 full-color cards, rules sheet; \$19.95

Given the current climate, you'd think there'd be more games based on the strife in the Middle East that fall into the "someone had to do it" vein. The pickings are slim, but **WMD: Weapons of Mass Destruction** is a good start.

WMD is the newest expansion for the **Nuclear War** card game. Flying Buffalo's satirical look at Cold War tensions hasn't lost much of its bite over the years, but its social relevance is updated here. As before, players always have two cards facedown on the table. On their turn they flip the first card face-up, the second card becomes the first, and a new one is put out facedown.

You're committed to your layout, so if circumstances change before your cards are revealed you're out of luck. For example, propaganda cards only work in peacetime. These are your country's attempts to badmouth others in the international community in hopes of getting their people to move to your far superior nation. Once nukes fall, they're useless (even the facedown ones). War starts when someone nukes someone else. You must flip up some sort of launch system (a rocket, missile, etc.) and follow that with an appropriate warhead -- get them out of order or use incompatible cards and your offensives fails. You may also have secrets with horrible effects like releasing toxic weapons.

Damage is measured in population. This is a separate deck of cards, to be stolen with propaganda or blown up by weapons. If you lose everyone to propaganda, this peaceful resolution knocks you out of the game. If you die in wartime, you can skip the normal card cycle and launch a final counterstrike with everything in your hand. The last player with population wins, but nuclear war being the glow-in-the-dark nightmare that it is, it's possible -- even likely -- no one will live to see the mushroom clouds settle, and the game is a draw.

The real challenge for the designer is keeping the deaths of millions meaningful, or at least funny. Like other sets, **WMD** is a standalone game, though you can combine it with others in the series to make what is at this point a massive single deck. It plays with up to four players -- field more if you like, but not much more. The small population deck is the biggest hurdle, but with fewer Nuclear War Cards in this iteration, it's also easy to blow through that deck.

And the stack performs double duty here. Other sets came with dice or whatnot to randomize the effectiveness of the weapons. A device might kill more, fewer, or just turn out to be a dud that falls harmlessly from the sky. These cards use numbers in the corners to the same end -- after detonation you flip another card from the draw pile and add that many casualties. It may also multiply the kills, or (rarely) signify a dud. To get more mileage from the deck, some cards are half missile and half payload, and you choose which half to use. Each is a mirror image, so, for example, a Polaris missile accompanies 10 megatons, both small items; you needn't worry that resorting to the little Polaris means sacrificing a 100-megaton bonanza.

Over the years the supplement illustrations have gotten better, though WMD does not completely abandon its

cartoonish origins. In fact, purchasers of this version are in for a treat -- the population cards are done by several industry notables, and they're full of favorite characters like Nodwick and the Knights of the Dinner Table. They're accompanied by several in-jokes, with game designers on some of the cards.

There are potential problems here. There are no spies -- plenty of secrets, but you can't steal them without combining sets. Only three cards indicate a dud (assuming no one just plays them first), so most of the missiles are going up. This may upset those to whom chaos is endearing or satirically appropriate, but everything here is in abbreviated form and the card supply has to stretch further. Along the same lines, there are only two interceptor cards (though they take down a liberal variety of weapons), so you'd better make them count.

As amusing as the population cards are, buyers should note they're cut from the same sheet as the playing cards -- that is, they're all the same size (previous population cards were distinct and smaller). This doesn't put the kibosh on using the old and new population cards together, but making change takes some juggling and no one will ever again believe anyone who claims to be low on population.

The game stays current and amusing, with subtle references and stinging jabs at anthrax scares, contested elections, and of course Saddam Hussein. Surprises keep the game from getting predictable, like the miniaturization card that lets you put oversized warheads on smaller missiles, and new ways to wipe out your friends. Thanks to Sudden Wind Change, you're no longer safe trying to empty your hand of spare nukes without delivery systems -- the fallout could do you in.

It's inevitable that ***Weapons of Mass Destruction*** will get lost in the big-pile shuffle of a full complement of ***Nuclear War*** cards, but they still bring their own brand of biting wit. The rules sheet is one of the clearest they've printed, and as a standalone it's nothing if not convenient. The whole thing fits in your pocket, and this microcosm plays well for small groups, especially those who need to irradiate the Earth in record time.

--Andy Vetromile

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Choices, Choices, Choices

Imagine that you are an alien mind -- completely devoid of knowledge of human bodies, the human experience, or the bulk of human lore, save for the literacy and comprehension skills that will be necessary for the latter part of this hypothetical. Now imagine that this mind is injected into a human body, and the human-body-alien-mind thingee is dropped into a supermarket. And the only piece of information given to the alien is that this body requires 2,000 calories a day of food, or it will die. And so the alien proceeds to roam the aisles, perusing the tens of thousands of items that make up a supermarket. And the alien reads each label, noting that calories are listed on almost every one, and the alien is trying how best to satisfy its needs, of which it only knows one -- the number of calories it needs. Imagine it picking up a Kool-Aid packet. A can of soup. A pack of gum. A wrapped package of raw chicken. A loaf of bread. A box of biscuit mix. All of them supposedly fulfill the one condition you've been given -- ingest calories. So how do you decide which to put into your mouth: the contents of the jar of jalapeno peppers or the cannister of baking powder?

I apologize for our international readers for whom the previous example didn't have as much impact. I'm well aware that 1) most other countries do not have the mega-huge supermarkets as we are familiar with them, and 2) most other countries also do not have any aliens to speak of. The second point is only countered in any significance by Great Britain, and those aliens are usually handled quite handily by a certain phonebox-emerging time lord.

Anyway, I mention the above example because I finally opened an IRA for myself, in an effort to plan for my retirement. Over the past year or so I've come to realize that my working plan of "Eat as much McDonald's as I can until I keel over at 50" may not be in the best interests of others around me, so I'm working on a Plan B.

And, like our hypothetical alien, I found myself completely and utterly befuddled by the number of options available to me. I waded through pages and pages of information, written in some strange symbols, signs, and terminology that I'm sure were an offshoot of Linear B. After six hours of consideration, I was literally no closer to understanding what I was doing than when I started.

Finally, I took the meager scraps of knowledge I made a decision -- one I'm feeling pretty good about. Yes, I've put my \$4,000 in Cow For Magic Beans (C4MB) fund; let's see how it turns out. During this time I also ate a can of tomato paste and another of water chestnuts (total calories: 200).

During this time I found myself longing for The Old Days, where I'd put in my 30 years working for the railroad, and I'd get a gold pocket watch and a pension. But pensions, pocket watches, and railroads have all suffered about the same setbacks in popularities of late -- they're not impossible to find, but relying on the existence or reliability of any one of them is going to get you late, flattened, or poor.

I didn't want as much choice as I was given; I wanted Something Simple. And I'm not alone; according to something I heard on NPR -- a source which, according to unnamed scientists, is 941% more reliable an uncredited source than the Internet -- companies that offer their employees more investment and saving opportunities end up having *less* participation. We all think options are good, but when people have too many choices they tend to fear making the wrong one, so they don't make any.

This is also common in the gaming world; when gamers are given too many choices in a game, they often feel more constrained by the system than if they were given fewer. For example, I'm currently acting as a sounding board for the development of the magic system book for the **D6 System**. For those who aren't aware, this system breaks down magical spells into four possible skills, one of which is rolled when using a spell. Thus to conjure a fireball one might roll one's *conjuration* skill. Spells are developed using an open-ended system that lets the creator devise pretty much any effect he'd want; given the nature of the system, it's possible (albeit really flippin' unlikely) that someone with the lowest possible skill might still be able to cast a hugely powerful spell.

Sounds pretty good, right? The problem is that many fans find it *too* open-ended; they find the double-edged combo of being able to create any spell coupled with the possibility of anyone being able to cast any spell to be overwhelming.

They have too many options.

Likewise many gamers, when presented with an open-ended character creation system (such as found in **GURPS** or the **Hero System**), are completely unable to make a decision and come up with a character. Or many folks shy away from CCGs because the notion of constructing one deck from hundreds or thousands of choices is too daunting.

Although there are many possible arguments to be made as to why, the most popular RPG is -- and has always been -- some flavor of **Dungeons & Dragons**. This system has never offered too much in the way of character-creation choices; although the latest versions have offered much more variety, the basic system would still be approachable enough for someone to make one of a dozen race choices, one of a dozen class choices, and a few abilities. (The original boxed set **Dungeons & Dragons** was even more approachable, with race and class melded into one choice.) Likewise the magic system is easily approachable; you can cast a small set of spells a set number of times a day, and making up your own spells isn't particularly encouraged. And through it all, there's only a few choices of setting, and only one of *genre*. Other RPGs have followed suit; for example, the various "clans" of the **World of Darkness** games are a way of compartmentalizing choice into a few discrete options.

The modern world has encouraged us that we should have as many options as possible. But too many choices in our games can leave us overwhelmed and not playing any games at all . . . which isn't what anyone wants.

And did you know that a stick of Crisco is 1,760 calories? Yum yum; that's most of a day's eating right there; I should buy stock!

--Steven Marsh

More Questions than Answers

Twelve Months Later

by Chris Aylott

We sold our first house today, and this has made me pause and reflect.

The sale isn't final yet, and won't be for a while. There are inspections to be passed, agreements to be drawn up, weeks or months until our chain of homeowners passes houses down the line like a hermit crab drill team. But it is a rite of passage, like opening a business, like buying the house, like having a baby.

The World's Greatest Baby is almost twelve months old. This is how much you can change in twelve months:

Year Zero





Twelve months ago she could barely move or see. Now she talks, stands (with a little help), and crawls with flair. She has likes, dislikes, and a mischievous personality. She sees everything around her and is fascinated by it. That's how much can happen in a year.

She isn't the only one who has changed, but we'll get to that. Something else happened today. Gameboard Distributors sent an email to its customers announcing "Gameboard accounts transferred to Blackhawk Hobby Distributors." The words "sold" and "out of business" and "unpaid publisher bills" were never said, but it's easy to read between the lines: There is one fewer game distributor. The hard business of consolidation continues; a wag I know suggested that Alliance should just tell people, "Sign up now, because we're just going to get you anyway."

Important? Not by itself. Gameboard was a minor player in the hobby, and their failure isn't going to change anybody's business strategy. But it's part of a shift that seems to be affecting all kinds of entertainment these days, from games to the movies.

Hollywood Blues

Movie ticket sales have been slumping all year, and last weekend's box office "winner" had the worst early May opening since 1998. Entertainment Weekly recently ran a poll asking its readers why they aren't going to the movies. "The quality of movies" was the biggest complaint, garnering 28% of the roughly 10,000 votes cast.

If you look further down the poll, however, a much more popular answer jumps out. Entertainment Weekly asked, "Can you imagine a time when you'd prefer seeing movies in your home?" Half of the respondents answered, "Imagine it? I already do." The usual complaints about self-selecting polls aside, there is a substantial fraction of potential movie-goers out there who would rather just stay home.

I know how I feel, because I'm one of them. I love movies, but the last movie I saw in the theater was *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* on its opening weekend. Long before the baby came, my wife and I were going out to fewer and fewer movies. Shortly after *Return of the King*, we signed up for Netflix and just . . . stopped going.

Netflix is easy. We make a list of movies we want and they send us the top three on the list. We watch them when we want and send them back when we're ready. After the World's Greatest Baby was born, we didn't watch a movie for two months. Netflix didn't mind, and the movies were right there the night we decided we did feel watching one.

Netflix alters an entire pattern of activity. Because we buy the service, we don't need to go to movie theaters, rent videos, or buy DVDs. We're still getting the experience we want, but we go fewer places and own less stuff. When we do go to the movies or buy a DVD, it's because we want to enjoy a crowd experience or see a movie over and over again. One thing I've learned this year is how rare those two wants are.

The Confucian Luggage Drop

It's not just movies, either. Over and over this year, I've looked around at the stuff that clutters our house and thought, "Do I really need this? How likely am I to watch that dusty *Babylon 5* video? Am I ever going to read Robert Sawyer's *Far-seer* again? Why do I still own these things?"

The World's Greatest Baby isn't the cause of these thoughts, but she does play a role in them. For a while, I told myself -- as I stubbed my toe on yet another bookcase -- that I was saving those books for her, that someday she'd thrill to the science essays of Isaac Asimov. Never mind that his 1960's essays were going out of date when I first read them in the 1980s, never mind that I didn't care for anything my parents read until I was grown up and out of the house.

Eventually, even I had to realize this was nonsense. There are classics that we are saving for her, but what she needs is space in which to develop her own interests. Her bookshelf has to be mostly empty so that she can fill it up her own way.

Learning this, I've begun to let go of things. It has gotten easier to keep the favorites and pass on the rest to somebody else, to focus on the experience rather than the thing. Some of this comes from watching the WGB in action, seeing how she drinks in one experience and then moves on to the next. Some of it comes from the convenience of services like Netflix.

TiVo reorganizes our television viewing. *City of Heroes* provides instant gaming at any hour of the night. As I bang out these words, I'm listening to a country radio station on iTunes. And even though we own a bookstore and buy plenty of books for ourselves, we've always been regulars at our local library.

Our experiences are becoming digital; even when we own them they take up a lot less space. Our baby pictures are on our hard drive, and we use the Fototime web site to share them with our family and friends. Remember disposable cameras at weddings? We went to a wedding last week; the bride and groom put out a computer and asked the guests to copy over their digital photos. Film has become an artist's medium, as obsolete for everyday use as oil paint on a canvas.

Hobby games have been moving online, too. Days of Wonder has thousands of registered players for the online versions of their board games. Gametable Online is a subscription-based service offering games like *Cosmic Wimpout*

and ***Kill Doctor Lucky*** from a variety of publishers. There are already GM aid programs for sale that duplicate most of the tools a gamemaster needs around the tabletop -- how long will it be before somebody combines a subscription to the software with a regular series of adventures for gamemasters to run?

None of these services are new, and few of them are profitable yet. However, they are growing fast. TiVo has doubled its subscriber base in the last 12 months, and it just held a Mother's Day giveaway of TiVo boxes to new mothers at a Dallas hospital maternity ward. TiVo claimed a recent survey showed that "91 percent of mothers with children would like to be able to watch their favorite TV shows any time they choose," and that almost 80 percent of moms would love to receive a TiVo DVR for Mother's Day.

TiVo expects to be profitable by the end of the year, and it's no surprise why. Who doesn't love a more convenient way of using something they already enjoy?

The New Service Economy

I've heard about the "service economy" for years, but I've always imagined it as a nation of McDonald's and Quik-E-Marts. In the last 12 months, as I've watched the game hobby struggle and railed about online game stores, MMORGs and better game design, I've started to see that "service business" has a wide definition. Helping me watch *The Apprentice* at 3 A.M. is a service. So is providing me with the materials I need to play Ticket to Ride, whether those materials are physical or virtual.

Of course, not everything in our hobby derives its value from being a service. A Black Lotus may help me win games of ***Magic: the Gathering***, but I don't think that's why people are paying \$500 for it. A well-painted Reaper Miniatures figure is no more useful than an unpainted figure, but people pay more for it. Hobbyists collect, and many bits of hobby paraphernalia are valuable because they are collectibles.

Twelve months after starting this column, I'm still picking at the question of what makes products and companies successful. Is success as simple as putting out a good service or a good collectible? Can you fail because you think your job is just to put out ideas or things?

If more gamers start buying services instead of things, does it become harder to compete in the gaming marketplace?

The Beauty of Emptiness

Collecting things used to be the hobby of the rich. As Gerard Jones points out in his history *Men of Tomorrow*, it took the mass production of pulp magazines and comic books to create the collecting community of science fiction, comics, and game fans that we are familiar with today. The pulps gave fans a common culture and things with which to demonstrate their expertise in that culture, and so the collections flourished.

But fans have always valued the things of their hobby for their utility, for the way in which they hold the knowledge of the shared culture. Aesthetics is often secondary, as we see every time a fan advocates more text and less art in a gaming rulebook. Most of the artifacts of fandom are repositories of knowledge, and while an old issue of *The Shadow* may be a collectible, a new game rulebook can be replaced if a more functional source of [information](#) comes along.

Twelve months ago, I would look around my house at walls covered with shelves and galleys piled high on the floor and feel glad to own so many books. But then we had a baby, and the more she grew, the more my wife and I realized how small our living space had become. We fine-tuned our collections, but we didn't really change until we decided to sell our house.

It's not a big house. About 700 square feet; I've had hotel rooms that were bigger. But it felt even smaller with bookcases looming on the walls, so as we did the usual house-selling ritual of scrubbing and vacuuming and putting geraniums on the porch, we packed up half the books and half the bookcases and put them in a storage facility. And then we were surprised when the first buyers came through and called the house "spacious."

Last night, I sat in my spacious little house and realized that the buyers were right. The place is so much more comfortable with less stuff in it. Our favorite things stand out, and there is a beauty in the empty space around them.

Sitting on the couch in my old house, I could visualize the living room of my new house. Plenty of places to sit, television, a table for board games and puzzles. Art on the walls, a few favorite books in a bookcase. There is even music in the air, but no CDs - the songs are stored on the computer in the office and played over the home network.

Simple. Relaxing. And all it takes is letting go of a few physical things.

Am I changing because I'm getting older? Because I'm a parent now? Because I live in a culture that is making it easier to enjoy without owning? I don't know. But I suspect I'm not so unusual in this new phase of the Information Age.

And if I am typical, what does that mean for the creators, retailers and distributors who provide us with our entertainment? How will they make their offerings more fun, more useful, more responsive, more convenient?

Stick around; something tells me the next twelve months are going to be an interesting ride.

* * *

1d6 Gamers



Chris Aylott is a husband and father who owns a bookstore and writes a little.

Designer's Notes: GURPS Mysteries

by Lisa Steele

Something is hidden, it must be uncovered. It's one of the world's most basic plots, but it is much harder to successfully portray in an interactive RPG setting than you might expect. I wrote **GURPS Mysteries**, in part, to help GM's avoid the mistakes I've made over the decades in trying to challenge my players with puzzling events in addition to combat. I also wrote it for players trying to figure out what their hardened detective character should do when confronted with a crime scene.

You'd have to live in a cave to avoid exposure to the huge number of mystery books, television shows, and movies currently available. Borrowing ideas from popular fiction is not as easy as it looks. Authors and screenwriters have complete control over their characters. They can present clues in very specific ways to obscure key items in a field of red herrings. They can control who their protagonists talk to, and what questions they ask. More importantly, they control what their characters *don't* ask, thus avoiding premature solutions and unnecessary details. GMs in an RPG just don't have that kind of control over the players or their characters.

"So use reality," you say, "Mystery fiction is all too contrived anyway." Most crimes in the real world aren't really all that puzzling. Most culprits don't use elaborate alibis and rare poisons; they kill people in mundane ways and are generally easily caught. Real life has loose ends, unreliable evidence, and irrational motives which leave unsettling gray areas in even a solid conviction. The mystery genre and **GURPS Mysteries** borrow heavily from reality, but twist it a bit in some places (and simplify it a bit in others) to make it more interesting and useful as entertainment.

GURPS Mysteries guides you through the adventure-design process by explaining the genre's underlying structures: the English-style cozy, the American hard-boiled adventure, and the technologically oriented police procedural. These formats are very good broad structures which can serve as a supporting frame for an adventure. Characters and situations that work in Agatha Christie's St. Mary's Meade don't work on the mean streets of Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles or CSI's Las Vegas. Chapter One talks about how to pick the format and structure that works best for an adventure, and how to plant clues and provide useful distractions. You will find discussions of both the classic puzzle-piece plot (define the clues and let the PCs find them in any order) and the ball-of-twine plot (provide clues that lead logically from scene to scene) as ways to structure an adventure.

If you are a player, Chapter One takes you behind the curtain and shows you some of the tricks to plot structure and clue placement. If you don't want to know how the sleight of hand works, skip ahead to Chapter Two.

Chapter Two is all about forensics, death, and injury, including a discussion of how to get rid of that irksome body and what evidence might be found despite the villain's best efforts to commit the perfect crime. If you're a GM who prefers to set up the scene and improvise than plan out your clues and encounters, Chapter Two will help you set the scene well. You'll also find lots of juicy details about causes of death, ways to identify suspects, and specific crimes including arson, kidnapping, and fraud that make good plot fodder. If you are a player whose character has come upon a crime scene, Chapter Two will give you ideas what to look for and how to interpret what you find.

The third chapter is about interviews and interrogations. Mysteries are about talking to people. (The cozy sub-genre, in fact, is almost *entirely* about talking, without a single gunshot, car chase, or brawl to stir the blood.) This means taking a detailed look both at how real detectives try to get people to talk, and at the **GURPS** social interaction rules. This was the hardest chapter to write. Social interaction rules should give a tongue-tied player the same opportunity to play a witty detective that the combat rules give a coach potato to play a martial artist. But, people like to roleplay conversations, interrogations, and accusations in a way that they don't act out combats. The social rules give players and GMs some ideas how to portray these scenes, and balance skill checks against a player's acting ability. Chapter Three also suggests some optional rules for using disadvantages as a social weapon. A detective who plays along with a Jealous target's fears and obsessions for example, will be more successful than a detective who has not recognized this weakness. If you are a player trying to decide what your detective will ask an NPC, this chapter will give you

several approaches based on the target and on your character's skills and strengths.

A **GURPS Mysteries** adventure can be part of almost any campaign using almost any game system. The ideas used in this book were developed in scenarios for various versions of D&D, Champions, West End's Star Wars RPG, FASA's Star Trek, Traveller (several incarnations), and, of course, **GURPS**. The game system does make a difference in how a mystery adventure works. Chapters Three (social interaction) and Six (paranormal adventures) are useful guides to the common pitfalls in these key areas.

The remaining chapters of **GURPS Mysteries** discuss time periods and genres: low-tech, the modern era, science-fiction, fantasy, horror, and psionics. You'll find discussions about specific challenge and opportunities in each genre. There are also various agencies that can be used as employers or adversaries -- including thief-takers, the Pinkerton agency, futuristic insurance investigators, and psionic legal investigators. The agencies were created or chosen to show the breadth of historical and modern detective work.

Of course, you will find character templates and advantages/disadvantages/skills. You'll find examples of the hardworking police detective, the cynical private eye, the genius consulting detective with his deerstalker, and many other possible protagonists. You'll find crime scene and detection gear too.

There is also, of course, a guide to books, television shows, and movies to inspire GMs and players alike.

Normally in a design article there is a discussion of things left on the cutting-room floor. **GURPS Mysteries** was fortunate not to have anything major cut for space. As a bonus, however, let me explain some of the art. Chapter 2, Page 38 has a discussion of blood spatters. The editor for this book asked for illustrations of the various patterns. I sent the art department a series of images taken from an in-court demonstration made by Dr. Henry Lee in an actual homicide trial to explain his crime scene analysis. (The original is ink, not blood, but Dr. Lee testified that the red ink has similar properties.) The blood stains illustrating the book correspond with some of the topics on this page.

Blood



Low-velocity patterns are found on pages 59 and 99. These could be caused by blood dripping from a wound onto a floor or other level surface. The size of the drop increases the farther the drop of blood falls onto the surface. The images on pages 36, 48, 75, 81, 89, and 90 are also low-velocity patterns, but here the surface is inclined -- the sharper the incline the longer the drip. The mathematically inclined could use trigonometry to figure out the exact angles; when a sphere of blood strikes a flat surface, the diameter of the sphere in flight equals the width of the stain and the length of the stain is equal to the hypotenuse of an inverted right triangle. The effect on inclined surfaces is similar, but you would need to

separate the original impact from the

More Blood

elongated drip due to gravity. In an adventure or a real crime scene if the shape and drip do not match the orientation of the object, it may be a clue that the object had been moved after the crime.



Medium-velocity patterns are found on pages 3, 29, 77, and 96. This is the kind of pattern produced by blood flung off a weapon by centrifugal force as it is swung ("cast-off") or from an arterial wound. You can also see a contact hand-print next to the medium-velocity pattern on page 3 and 29. It is enlarged on pages 77 and 96. This could be caused by the attacker or victim touching the surface for support after the assault or homicide.



Rivers of Blood

A high-velocity pattern is on page 7 at the bottom.

This is the kind of pattern you would find from a gunshot, explosives, or possibly coughing or sneezing. The medium and high velocity patterns appear to come from a single point. With larger patterns, criminologists can draw lines through the center of individual stains to find the point of convergence where the blow was struck.



Out, Out, Damn Spot!

Contact wipes are on pages 24, 53, and 112. (Here, someone has touched blood and wiped it across a surface.) The swipes on pages 8, 44, 54, 62, 120, and 121 are all contact smears; the person has blood on their hands or clothing and has smeared it onto a surface -- longer swipes mean faster speeds.



Out, Out, Damn Spot!



Sadly, every project must come to an end. I would like to thank Jonathan Turner, who lent me his prodigious library of

mystery novels and helped write and re-write the first chapter and Allen Wilkins, my husband, for editing the various drafts. Between the change from **GURPS Third Edition** to **GURPS Fourth Edition** and from a printed book to e23, this project was three years in the making. I'd also like to thank the editors for patience with questions and with a series of word-processor incompatibility woes.

Even with the delays, I did not get a few last sources into the manuscript. Here are some books that I came upon after the book was written which I commend to the **GURPS Mysteries** purchaser.

On Forensics

- Baden, Michael, *Dead Reckoning: The New Science of Catching Killers*, (Simon & Schuster 2001) (New York City Medical Examiner's discussion of forensics and famous cases).
- Horswell, John, *The Practice of Crime Scene Investigation*, CRC Press (2004) (another practitioner-oriented text on crime scene work with useful pictures and diagrams).
- Lyle, D.P., *Forensics for Dummies*, Wiley Publishing, Inc. (2004) (a great resource for GMs and players surveying forensic methods: the last section on Hollywood myths is useful for RPG GMs looking for more verisimilitude in their adventures).
- Doyle, James, *True Witness: Cops, Courts, Science, and the Battle Against Misidentification*, Palgrave (2005) (history of the struggle between research psychologists and lawyers over how eyewitness testimony is used in criminal trials).

On Policing and Crime outside the U.S.:

- Etienne, Steven, Maynard, Martin, and Thompson, Tony, *The Infiltrators*, Penguin Books (2000) (undercover work in Scotland Yard).
- Gray, Roger, *The Trojan Files*, Virgin (2000) (armed policing in and around London).
- Hames, Michael, *The Dirty Squad*, Warner Books (2000) (policing obscenity).
- Latham, Richard, *Deadly Beat: Inside the Royal Ulster Constabulary*, Mainstream Publishing (2001) (an RUC officer's-eye view of the force).
- Ryder, Chris, *The RUC: A Force Under Fire*, Arrow (2000) (a historical view of the force).
- Townley, Lynne, Ede, Roger, *Forensic Practice in Criminal Cases*, *The Law Society* (2004) (guide to UK forensic practice written for lawyers).

Funerary Procession

for *GURPS*

by James P. Barrett

Ingredients

The Deceased

The late Andrew Pollard was an accountant at a large financial company in the city. He was quiet and unassuming, generally kept to himself, and didn't have any enemies to speak of. He didn't have many friends either. His life was orderly, ritualized, and dull. Five days a week he would work hard at his job, before going home (normally after putting in at least an hour of overtime) and listening to classical CDs. He lived alone and had no surviving family other than his ex-wife Margaret. On weekends he played in a local bowling league, tended his small garden, and sometimes went out for a drink with friends. He had had no romantic involvements since his marriage ended three years ago.

The Offense

Two weeks ago Andrew started complaining of horrible nightmares -- nightmares so bad that he came into work exhausted, as if he had gotten no sleep at all. His work suffered as a result, and a week ago he was called up on a financial discrepancy which he had failed to notice in a client's files. His employers have yet to complete a formal enquiry, but he was suspended from work with pay while they looked into the matter -- and if the discrepancy is what it appears to have been he would certainly have lost his job.

After his suspension, Andrew became irritable and surly. His friends tried to help him but he brushed off their aid. Refusing to talk about the problem he was abusive when they did call round, and in a series of petty arguments he managed to give away secrets he had agreed to keep, attacked them on their weakest points, and otherwise succeeded in alienating even the closest of his buddies. Becoming even more depressed he began to drink, which he hadn't done since college.

Three days ago he came home while drunk after having a raging argument with his ex-wife (who until recently he had gotten along with very well) and slipped on the steps. When he was discovered the next morning his neck was broken, and he had been dead for several hours.

The Pall-Bearers

Today is Andrew's funeral, which is where the investigators come in. Each should be a normal person living in the city in question who knew Andrew well enough to have been asked to be pall-bearers at his funeral. All will have been amongst the friends whom he alienated in the last couple of weeks of his life, but it's amazing how much death can change people's perspective on a person -- especially one who has up until recently been a good and decent friend.

They meet before the funeral, and attend the service. Andrew had asked that his body be cremated, and the ashes scattered in a local park. Afterwards they spend the evening in his favorite bar discussing what happened. As well as the PCs the funeral is also attended by Margaret (his ex-wife), Joshua Reynolds (his immediate boss), Thomas McIntyre (an official of the local Bowling League), and Tobias Phoulkes (a co-worker of Andrew's in the same office).

The Aftermath

The night after the funeral, one of the PCs starts to suffer from horrible nightmares. If left unchecked he will suffer from a work-related mishap (possibly resulting in loss of his job) within a week, and within another 1d days his friends will gradually become estranged from him (try to ensure that at any point when something can go wrong with his personal life it does. This may require asking the other players to come up with reasons to fall out with the PC). If nothing stops the process then after another 1d days he will have some form of accident, resulting in 6d damage (being hit by a car or bus would work, as would a fall from a high window).

Naturally once it becomes clear that the same thing which happened to Andrew is happening to him, the PC will try his best to find out what, and how this could be. Generally this will mean examining the last few weeks of Andrew's life for clues.

What's Happening

Most GMs familiar with *GURPS Ritual Magic* will recognize the effects of a Malediction curse. Clearly the curse was placed upon Andrew for some reason, and has since been transferred to the PC who is being affected. The other heroes should also realize that if the effects reach the same conclusion with the affected PC as they did with Andrew then there is a fairly good chance that another of them may be the curse's next victim. Generally a good reason for the curse having been placed upon Andrew can be constructed by examining the backgrounds of the PCs and seeing if anything is held in common between them (secrets, old lovers, even common interests could help) and working from that. If no such reason can be found then a few good possibilities exist:

- Andrew was in Tobias' way at work. Tobias wanted a promotion, but was sure that Andrew was going to get it instead. He either went to a Witch Doctor, or performed the ritual himself.
- Andrew's will still lists Margaret as his main heir (unsurprisingly since they still got along very well), and she knew that. Having hit hard times (either through loss of a job, or through having sunk all of her money into a project which fell through) she was looking for a way to regain her fortunes (and repay the unscrupulous gentlemen from whom she was forced to borrow). Upon mentioning her possible inheritance those same unscrupulous men put her in touch with an adept.
- Andrew wasn't just a fanatical bowler, he was a good one too. The team he played for was the favorite to win the local league. Thomas, however realized that if Andrew could be removed from the picture then he could make a fair amount of money from gambling.
- Andrew's latest work would have shown up vast financial irregularities within the company, most of which involved Joshua's frequent and extensive embezzling of client's funds. Even Andrew didn't realize this yet, but Joshua knew that he would.

It's perfectly possible that all of the above motivations could be true (although having them all have cast a Malediction against Andrew might be a little extreme). Any way around the perpetrator will be panicking because when the PCs actually turned up to Andrew's funeral they assumed that they had not been driven away from him by the effects of the curse. Cursing one of the PCs (and then the others) is an extreme, but understandable reaction.

Side Salad

One Option to make this even more serious would be to actually kill one of the PCs. Have the effects of the malediction begin to affect him, allow them to take their course, and reach their ultimate climax (assuming the other PCs don't manage to stop it) then have the accident occur -- and end the first session of play there.

Afterwards, when the other players are not present inform the player who's character died that he gets up, steps out of his body, and is confronted with a cold, hazy, gray version of the world. Nearby is a small horrifically demonic looking creature (the only thing which isn't misty and gray); it looks straight at him, before seeming to be dragged away across the city (back towards the Adept who cast the Malediction, and is now recasting it). Hand the Player the details of a Ghost template. He may well suppose that by somehow arranging the destruction of his murderer he'll be able to go on to a real afterlife -- or he may just realize that the little spirit which enacted the malediction has a taste for him now,

and once the Adept has run out of targets for his ritual it may well be free to come back and devour him. This option works especially well if the ghost template in question doesn't include any overt materialization abilities.

Another option is to leave all the PCs alive but to have Andrew's ghost attempt to contact them (through knocking, occasional manipulation of probability, and other spiritual abilities). This has the advantage that it's easier to run, but the disadvantage that it is in many ways less spooky and unnerving than actually having one of the PCs die at the end of the first session.

Finally it should be considered that in order to combat the adept responsible the PCs may need to contact a magical group of some sort for help. This could be as simple as a local Voudoun or Wicca group, or as sinister as The Cabal. Any way around it's unlikely that these magicians will help the PCs for free, rather they may well seek some form of service in payment. Owing a favor to the magical equivalent of the mafia is not a good situation to be in -- but it makes a perfect hook to turn this into the start of a **GURPS Cabal** or **GURPS Voodoo** campaign.

Pyramid Review

Tibet the Role Playing Game

Published by [Vajra Enterprises](#)

Written by Brian St. Claire-King

Cover by Samuel Araya

Illustrated by Lorie Albrecht, Laura Dubuk, Jason Juta, Britt Martin, & Martina Pilcerova

224-Page Perfect Bound Softback; \$29.95

At first thought, the country of Tibet seems an odd subject for an RPG. Then again, there are so many RPGs devoted to both China and Japan, certainly of the latter, that few of them seem strange. But *Tibet the Role Playing Game* published by Vajra Enterprises is not set in the medieval period like most Japan or China set titles, instead being set in the 20th century. Specifically the year is 1959, nine years after China marched across her borders and forced a slow conversion to communism upon Tibet. Now the country seems ready to descent into chaos -- Chinese troops mass ready to take over Tibet, the Chinese government threatens to disband the Tibetan government, the people fear for the safety of their revered religious leaders, and could break into open anti-Chinese rebellion at any moment.

This is an opportunity for the gamer to explore another oriental, but still very different country and culture at a moment of great crisis. It presents a clash of cultures, that of deeply religious Tibetans versus the uniformly Maoist and highly critical nature of the People's Republic of China. Politically it not surprisingly adheres to a Tibetan bias -- the PRC is definitely the bad guy here. The current situation has the Chinese occupying and ruling the eastern half of the country; the Tibetan aristocracy maintains an uneasy peace with them while readying themselves to leave if the Chinese decide to crack down on them. The nomadic tribes, funded by the merchants, wage a successful guerrilla war against the Chinese. The actual Tibetan government headed by the Dalai Lama is caught in the middle, trying not to arouse the ire of the PRC by supporting the rebellions, while the people worry for the safety of the Dalai Lama.

While the PRC has its own theology, the Tibetan people have their own beliefs and religions. This is primarily the Tibetan form of Buddhism, plus the folklore religion Bon, the organized religion from before the arrival of Buddhism, and oracles that are part of all three. The Tibetan world is one where both magic and the supernatural are very real . . . but only by the evidence they leave. Those that study or practice magic have the ability to determine the nature of such events. While sorcery is feared (because of its ability to release bad karma), astrology, holy charms, weather control and exorcism are all accepted by the average Tibetan. The Buddhist sects also possess knowledge of secret rituals that can harm others, though their main preoccupation is of course achieving enlightenment. For most Tibetans acquiring enough to gain a pleasant rebirth is a sensible enough goal.

Lots of background is presented in this game, detailing the culture, history, religions, and beliefs of Tibet. It starts out by describing how the average Tibetan lives and what he wears, item by item, before going into greater depth about his religion, Tibetan cosmology, and the various Buddhist sects. Nyingmapa is the oldest, most shamanist, and unorganized religion, with knowledge of some harmful sorcery and an emphasis upon tantras, the quicker, but more dangerous paths to enlightenment. Sakyapa is also old, focusing upon scholasticism and logic, but with an unsavory reputation for magic and sorcery. Newer is the Kagyupa sect that emphasizes body control yogas over logic and philosophy, while the better-known Gelugpa -- or "Yellow Hat" -- sect stresses philosophy and purity over magical

rituals. This leaves them little in the way of magical defense, but martial arts training -- Crane Kung Fu or Tibetan Tai Chi, is a common means of defense in its stead, often learned by the Dobbobs, the monastic police officers. A simple table at rear of the book lists the differences between Tibetan and American cultures.

Tibet the Role Playing Game employs a rough class and level system. Character creation begins by splitting 90 points between nine attributes rated between one and 20, Karma being the only outré statistic. There are 25 classes listed, from Aristocrat and Craftsperson to Unclean and Weathermaker. The majority are religious or mystical in nature, including the various Buddhist sects, plus Astrologer, Dobbob, Oracle, Revenant (a returnee from hell sent to warn others of its sufferings), Sorcerer, and Weathermaker. It is also possible to play a Foreigner, who could be a Scholar, Mountain Climber, Reporter, Missionary, and so on.

Besides defining his place and role in society, a character's class also determines the cost of the various categories, which vary from class to class. A player has 100 points to spend on these. Depending upon his class, a skill can cost anywhere between two and 20 points per level. Most classes also have a special ability or skill. For example, the Treasure Finder can buy a number of unique skills: Treasure Location, Treasure Verification, and Treasure Meditation. Points can also be spent on advantages like Chinese Trained (Military or Scholastic), Monastic Training, or Western Educated; or gained for disadvantages such as Bad previous Life, Opium Addiction, or Tulpa, this last indicating that the character is the creation of a Sorcerer. One nice touch included in the description of each class is a list of suggested reading elsewhere in the book.

Despite being a class and level system, ***Tibet the Role Playing Game*** allows plenty of flexibility in terms of character progression. It sharply defines a character's class as what a character does, but what he is getting better at as his discipline. The latter can be exactly the same as his current class, but it could be an entirely different class all together. It could even be one of the new given disciplines, such as Bandit, Exorcist, or Tibetan Government Spy. While this Class and Discipline system is hardly new, the campaign and roleplaying opportunities it offers are pleasingly explored and discussed.

To reflect the game's Buddhist nature, players must also select five attachments, such as Brutality, Logical, or Fame. These reflect both a character's personality and what separates him from enlightenment. By improving his Karma and removing these attachments, a player moves his character towards enlightenment. Either is a difficult process, gaining Karma all the more so because so many actions typical to roleplaying will often lose a character Karma. The benefit of moving closer to enlightenment is that a character can perform miracles, while achieving it forces the character's retirement.

The mechanics in ***Tibet the Role Playing Game*** involves a d20 roll plus an attribute or skill modifier versus a difficulty factor. Combat develops this further, perhaps making it a little overcomplicated to get the desired degree of detail. But otherwise, there is nothing wrong with what the publisher calls its "Organics Rule Components."

The section on adventuring offers up plenty of suggestions. It covers getting the characters together, along with a variety of different missions. These include military, political, ceremonial, and mystical adventures. The setting's many dangers are also discussed, from traveling and ordinary humans to Rakshasas and wild animals. There are oodles of ideas throughout the section, and that is before you get to the two adventures. In "Struggle session," the characters come across a village where the commander of the local Chinese garrison is conducting public torture sessions on the lama of the nearby monastery to force him to recant his faith. In "Silent Valley," they come across an abandoned monastery whose only resident is its lama who wants their aid in finding a hidden valley where he can retire and meditate. Although they are short, both adventures nicely explore the spiritual and secular aspects of the setting.

Where ***Tibet the Role Playing Game*** scores highly is in its physical presentation, even though its layout style is hardly new. While ordinary, clean, and decent, it goes out of its way to keep the reader informed with a running glossary throughout much of the book (in addition to the glossary at the back) and brief summaries given before many of its subjects. Further, the book is lavishly illustrated with period photographs that do much to enhance the book's look and impart the setting to the reader.

Mechanically, the game does feel dated, and it is not hard to see done as a ***d20 System*** RPG, or indeed adapted to any set of modern RPG rules. But the wealth of information the game contains lifts above the choice of mechanics, as well

as giving us a superb introduction to the country, culture, and religion of Tibet. Clearly a well-researched labor of love for the author, ***Tibet the Role Playing Game*** certainly has the more mature gamer in mind. Thus it is the devotees of such games as ***Ars Magica*** and ***Empire of the Petal Throne*** that are likely to get the most out of ***Tibet the Role Playing Game***, perhaps the first modern-set culture RPG.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

The Authority Roleplaying Game and Sourcebook

Published by [Guardians of Order](#)

Written by Jesse Scoble, John Chambers, John Snead, Matt Forbeck, Matt Keeley, Mark C. MacKinnon, Jeff Mackintosh, & David Pulver

Art by Bryan Hitch & John McCrea

Edited by Mark MacKinnon & Jesse Scoble

352-page full-color hardcover (48-page *Authority* supplemental in b&w); \$44.95

Not since *Aberrant* have players had such a chance as this to flex their muscles in an RPG -- not their roleplaying muscles, but their characters' actual muscles. *The Authority*, based on the DC/Wildstorm comic book of the same name, is about superheroes whose power seems to approach that of the divine.

For anyone unfamiliar with the funny books, the *Authority* is a group of heroes gathered by the disillusioned Jenny Sparks, living embodiment of the 20th century. She's seen the half-hearted, corrupt measures used by the United Nations and their ilk, and she's convinced she and her team can make a real difference in the world. She puts the baddest metahumans on the block -- including the Doctor, shaman to the world; nano-infused gadgeteer the Engineer; and Jack Hawksmoor, God of Cities, among others -- onto an enormous city-ship that can traverse space and parallel dimensions, and makes her intentions known to the squabbling peoples of Earth: Behave, or suffer the consequences. Fortunately for humanity, the *Authority* seldom needs threats to make its point. Instead, perils show up on their own and give the team a chance to strut its stuff. Vast armies of teleporting terrorists, alternate-world aliens looking for new breeding grounds, and Earth-shattering elder gods get their butts handed to them, making it pretty clear to anyone who's paying attention that the *Authority* has the planet's best interests at heart (as well as the power to rip *its* proverbial heart from its proverbial chest).

Using Silver Age Sentinels (both the [d20 System](#) and [Tri-Stat system](#)), the authors have gone for what they call widescreen action -- super adventures so far over the top they're in a class by themselves. Villains are all colossi striding the Earth looking for monuments and governments to topple, and the heroes all possess enough might to chuck cars like snowballs. Even those with low-key, low-level powers have skill enough to come up with all manner of clever uses for those abilities.

And therein lies most of the difference between this book and previous versions of Guardians of Order's *Silver Age Sentinels* -- it's all big. (Great chunks of this book appear in *Silver Age Sentinels* products, so buyers should be careful they're not sinking more cash into this semi-duplicate than they're comfortable with.) The recommendation here is "stick to Skill Groups" . . . larger than life action means tracking a man across a city block is pointless. PCs buy a generic block of, say, "investigation," and that one number is used for related rolls (the option to use all the skills is there if you want it). They suggest using 12-sided dice, not 10s -- greater extremes for extreme results. And to better duplicate the source material, most of the powers now burn energy. There are a couple new attributes for players to fool with, and the really wacky powers (Dynamic Powers, Power Flux) mean everything to the godlike, so they get a lot more attention. If you'd rather skip all that and stick with the *d20 System*, everyone here is built on the Adventurer class.

Those great sweeping gestures in the rules are a red flag for anyone looking for a heavy element of roleplaying. *The Authority* isn't about Peter Parker's trouble with the ladies; it's about the trouble one has picking up a big enough building. The GM advice sections (getting players into the setting's mindset finds its way into the book in many forms) do admirable service to getting you going, but if played to the hilt there just isn't much room for anything little, be it boyfriends or petty theft.

The artwork is taken from the first 12 issues of the comic book, so if you're already familiar with them, you know what to expect. If you haven't read it, rest assured, the pictures are every bit as classy and overpowering as the subject matter they evoke. The text is that same tall, elongated font (again, if you know *Guardians . . .*), though the font is bigger in the rules sections. Nota bene: Both the words and the pictures can be adults-only material.

If you haven't followed the story, fear not; by book's end, you'll know these characters and their world as well as any fan. One of the more distracting features of the introductory persona-by-persona checklist at the front of the volume is the odd tendency to overuse qualifiers. Sure, it's a licensed product, but if they're working with the creators even a little bit, you have to wonder why the word "likely" is in there as often as Apollo's name (the glut of superlatives is probably a result of writing about gods). Are they prevented from saying anything without hedging? It's as if it's being written by an IP lawyer who's unwilling to commit himself. No one expects them to know everything Warren Ellis has up his sleeve, but they act like they're worried we're looking to them for stock futures.

This is a squat, fat little book with pretty much all you need to play a Tri-Stat game (if you want to go the ***d20 System*** route, the usual companion pieces are required). If you look past the chunk of system material (and much of it *has* been reworked) and know what sort of setting you're letting yourself in for, this is a good example of cross-media translation. Chock full of notes about the main characters and their stats, alternate worlds, and spot-on GM advice, it's a pleasure just to hold ***The Authority*** in your hands. It's only the first step to feeling awfully giddy with power.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

World of Darkness: Ghost Stories

Published by [White Wolf Gaming Studios](#)

Written by Rick Chillot, Matt Forbeck, Geoff Grabowski, Matthew McFarland, Adam Tinworth, & Chuck Wendig

Art by Sam Araya, Jim DiBartolo, Anthony Granato, August Hall, Michael William Kaluta, Joshua Gabriel Timbrook, Jamie Tolagsun, & Becky Jollensten

127-page b&w hardcover; \$24.99

As a major -- but not uncritical -- fan of White Wolf's *Wraith: the Oblivion* and *Orpheus*, I was filled with some trepidation when I heard that there would be a book of Ghost Stories for the new World of Darkness.

Put bluntly, I was worried that it might be terrible. In the past, White Wolf's stabs at scenarios and adventures often fell flat, due to their being too wonky, unwieldy, and complicated to run as written. This was a shame, since White Wolf always excelled at creating evocative settings, giving them a sense of history and populating them with interesting NPCs; their writers just never seemed able to make the leap from brooding menace to actual action without losing their readers along the way.

However, it's a whole new World of Darkness, now: new format, (mostly) new systems and new ideas, hopefully taking the mistakes of the past into account. So would *World of Darkness: Ghost Stories* repeat the mistakes of the past, only this time in hardcover? Or had they learned from such "gems" as *Chaos Factor* and the *Diablerie* series?

Fortunately for us, the answer is yes, they *did* learn something. *zGhost Stories* is a well-done book that presents five spooky stories, and good ideas on how to run ghost stories in general. It may not deliver exactly what's promised on the back cover, but that shouldn't mar the enjoyment of the book or its utility. And if you like running ghost stories in other horror games, such as *GURPS Horror* or *Call of Cthulhu*, *Ghost Stories* is a worthwhile resource.

(Fair warning: There are some spoilers in this review. Don't read it if you think your Storyteller wants to use this book.)

The book is a hardcover, and a slim one at that. It's very well-presented and laid out, and the text is clear and understandable. The art ranges from excellent to all right, with good art choices all around, though I wish they'd had something else for the cover.

As with all things White Wolf, there's gaming fiction for a prologue: skip it, and jump to the well-considered Introduction, instead. There, we get an excellent -- if short -- primer on Storytelling *Ghost Stories* that's full of good ideas on setting these stories up, getting characters into them and resolving the action. There's also a summary of the Storytelling rules for Ghosts, so you don't have to flip back and forth between this book and *The World of Darkness' Core Book* all the time.

Then we have the stories, themselves -- all of which have at least something to recommend them, even if I wouldn't run all of them as written.

- "Dust to Dust" is both first and best of the lot, gives us a ghost town in all senses of the term. It plays into **White Wolf's** old strengths by presenting a location and giving ideas on what to do with it, rather than presenting a linear progression of events. And the fact that the location, itself, is one of the ghosts makes this tale of dark, buried secrets all the more sweet.
- "The Terrifying Tale of James Magnus" tries to be a modern combination of M.R. James' "Count Magnus" and Shirley Jackson's "The Haunting of Hill House," but flounders on a highly-improbable -- and over-sexed -- back story. That said, the house itself is an unholy terror, with lots of good, solid ideas on how to haunt it, and how it will use intruders' dark passions against them. If you liked Jackson's story, and/or the original version of "The Haunting," this house is for you.
- "No Way Out" presents a spectral reminder that suicide solves no one's problems. This tale of a ghost's revenge on others for exposing the mess he'd made of his life follows a linear model, tracking the breakdown of the spook's personality. It also serves as an extended Scenario, where the characters might think they have solved the problem, only to have it pop up again, and again.
- "Roots and Branches" is also linear -- maybe too linear -- but gives us an excellent location, and a chilling adversary in the Murder Tree. It also gives us a detour that may not have been necessary -- culminating in another borrowing from a M.R. James story -- and an NPC who can solve too many of the characters' problems. But if you prune the story back a bit, a good, solid scare remains.
- "Holy Ghost" pits the characters against a brutally-murdered Reverend with ungodly retribution in mind. This story goes back to presenting a location, rather than an "adventure": we get the location, its history, and the ghost's conflict with it, leaving the Storyteller to devise the narrative. The story's combination of religion gone awry, a community's shame and a father's guilt is powerful stuff.

The toys? Along with the locations and their ghostly antagonists, we get rules for three optional ghost powers that run from maddening to grotesque. We also get a primer on how to make a "Ghost Town": "the spirit of a place that has 'died' in some fashion."

The good? Much like the new **World of Darkness**, every opportunity has been taken to give options to the Storytellers. These Stories are rife with ideas for alternate settings, ways to get the group into it, and ways to deal with the challenges the ghosts present. At their best, they present locations, backstories and ideas for haunting that give Storytellers total latitude in presenting them.

The bad? There is a sameness among some of the stories. Three of them have ghostly dogs/coyotes chasing the characters, and three of them have tragedies fueled by adultery. If you're planning on running more than one of them, you might want to change things a bit, so as to avoid sounding like a one-note Storyteller.

And that's another problem, there: the book is "your first opportunity to play mortals as characters with the Storytelling System," but if you're planning on running a long-term Chronicle, how many of the stories can you really run? One or two might be presented before the characters become Vampires, Werewolves or Mages, and after that the ghosts might not be as challenging, or as dangerous.

Plus, once your mortals get templated into something else, you may have to toybox the book after all, or else make the scenarios a lot tougher than presented. As someone who has a ball with doing either, I have no problems with that. But if you're the sort of Storyteller who prefers to have these things done *for* you, then you might not feel you've gotten your money's worth.

Those quibbles aside, **Ghost Stories** is a good sign that the new **World of Darkness** is on the right track. Gone are the confusing "Adventures" that required a non-euclidean flowchart to properly present, and in their place are good, solid locations and backstories to base a narrative from. I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to run a Mortals Chronicle using the new **World of Darkness** rules, and those who like running horror games in general.

--J. Edward Tremlett

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Mysterious Musings

While stumbling around on my own desert island recently, having emerged from a plane crash that upset my tiny bottle of alcohol, I found a new television show that I'm quite smitten with. Sure, its four-letter title may not seem to offer much, but for me it re-opened a love of adventure, excitement, and mystery -- all of which I thought were lost.

That show is, naturally enough, *Monk*.

For those of you who are unaware, *Monk* is a detective show set in San Francisco, revolving around a titular character whose name is Adrian Monk. It's a light drama, in the same vein as *Murder, She Wrote* or *Magnum P.I.* A former police detective, Monk lost his wife from a car bombing and was demoted shortly thereafter because his mental health problems utterly ballooned out of control. Obsessive-compulsive, phobic, and utterly neurotic, Monk is an unlikely protagonist for a detective series; he stores his clothing in individual bags, arranges other peoples' furniture to make it symmetrical, and refuses to drink anything but one brand of bottled water even if he's dying of thirst. Fortunately, he can tell at a glance which inmate of a hundred has stolen a watch; he can tie a piece of clothing to a criminal by the stitching on it; he can solve a game of *Clue* before it begins. Yes, Monk is also brilliant . . . and so is the show.

I've had occasion to watch the first two seasons of this show (since they're out on DVD), and it's been rare since I've gone from passing interest to total fawning fanboy of a show this quickly. And, in an effort to sort out why, I'm going for one of my patented lists of random thoughts where, no doubt, I'll miraculously stop somewhere around the 1,000-word mark. Oh, and I'll probably even tie it into gaming.

Monk is hyper-competent; he's also a basket case. From a dramatic standpoint, this device enables us to view Monk as both the underdog and the hero. He's so fragile and helpless that we can't help but feel for him when he's compelled to keep buying \$20 shots of scotch, because he can't stand its uneven level next to a bottle of water. (He gives the shot to the person next to him in the bar, who washes it down with some water . . . and the cycle continues.) But he's also the hero; you know he'll set things right for the world, even if he can't conquer his own inner demons. In game terms, *Monk* might be built on the same number of points as most heroes, but he's jacked up some of his abilities to the stratosphere, and needs to pay for them by being a wreck.

Monk reaffirms my belief that limitations are fun. Sure, there's something kind of fun about playing the butt-kicking, grizzle-jawed, tough hero with no discernable weaknesses. But in thinking back to all my favorite gaming characters, I realize they all pretty much had major problems -- whether overconfidence, cowardice, fanaticism, or the like -- that gave them flavor. Yes, the hero is probably going to save the day . . . but when he escapes the burning building, is he fleeing at top speed because he's afraid of fire, is he getting dragged out by his friends because he thinks he can survive the flames, or is he shouting a sermon in honor of his deity as the building is collapsing around him? Yes, it's true that every time two characters interact, one wants something from the other . . . but all Adrian Monk may want is to cut the stray hairs in the person's bangs, because they're driving him crazy.

The show knows what it is, and revels in it. I think this fact alone has elevated the show to the delightful level for me. It knows its formula, it knows the formulae of other shows of its ilk, and it has fun with this fact. While I tend to struggle to find ways to push the box in my own gaming adventures -- by, say, having the villain show up at the heroes' door -- *Monk* is content to have fun within the established confines. So in the last 10 minutes of one episode, Monk is being endangered by a group of criminals, so his assistant Sharona puts the pieces of the mystery together and explains things to the audience; when Monk escapes, he starts to reveal what he figured out, but Sharona stops him, saying, "I already did the wrap-up!" In another episode, the entire mystery takes place aboard an airplane, with Monk struggling with his own fear of flying while realizing that another passenger must have recently murdered someone.

This isn't a *Moonlighting*-esque demolition of the fourth wall, but rather gentle nods to the audience that television can be good-naturedly *fun*. And, in the gaming world, it would be possible to inject this same type of light frivolity into some campaigns. Maybe the dungeon builder uses an enchantment so his dragon never needs to eat, enabling him to build the rest of the dungeon around the dragon . . . that way, it can remain in its room without being able to roam the too-narrow corridors. Maybe the big bad guy at the end of the adventure bellows out, "Yes, *I'm* the big bad guy at the

end of your little . . . adventure. Do you have the initiative to stop me?"

If you enjoy classic detective shows in the vein of *Columbo*, *Kojak*, or *Ironside*, then I can't recommend *Monk* enough. And even if you don't, you may want to give it a try anyway.

But, when you put the DVDs back, just . . . make sure that they're all rotated so that they're facing up. In all of them. You may want to check that first one you put back; you jostled it a bit, so it might not be even . . . No, just check it again . . .

--*Steven Marsh*



Part II

Words & Art by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Cartography by Kory M. Kaese of [Mystic Station Designs, LLC](#)

Editor's Note: The first half of this epic "Campaign in a Box" appeared [last week](#). If you haven't read it, go do so first; otherwise, this part is going to make as much sense as when you tried to figure out who that black-helmeted guy was the time you watched **Revenge of the Sith** as your first introduction to this whole **Star Wars** thing.

Genre: Fantasy.

Style: Baroque Adventure.

Fidelity: Low.

Theme(s): Order/Stasis vs. Chaos/Change; Faction Politics.

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What Everybody Doesn't Know

Counting (Celestial) Crows

There are only seven members of this Tribe left within the Empire; there may be other groups of Crows living in the Tiger Tribelands. The rest have either left (for the Heavens or for another mortal land?) or died. They are awaiting the fulfillment of a mysterious prophecy which they will not speak of in any great detail. When that prophecy comes to pass, four Celestial Crows will leave (or die, the wording is imprecise), leaving three to await a *second* prophecy. When that is achieved, two Crows will vanish, leaving one Crow to await resolution of a *third and final* prophecy.

Also, though the Crows demand (and reward) politeness, they feel no need to follow their own rules. They will deal with Tribesmen with brusque attitudes, informal modes of speech, and discourteous diminutives (Pony/Colt, Sheep/Lamb, Mutt/Puppy, Chicken/Cock, Pig/Piglet, Lizard/Hatchling, and Kitty/Cub).

Fiery Tongue's Dying Curse

"I curse you with the power of my Blood, and the Blood of all I own: One day, you will be the 'barbarians,' and the Tiger shall knock the Dragon off of its perch."



Tiger Plans

They are planning on invading the Empire next year. Given the usual gap of time between invasion attempts, the Tiger Chiefs believe that the Six Tribes will not expect one soon. Luckily, an altercation with a far-Western Tribe did not escalate to war (as it usually does), and the intervening peace has permitted the Tigers to build up a force that matches or exceeds that of four hundred years ago.

Discovery of the Hilt of the Broken Sword

In arranging tribute from Digging Youth, the chieftain of the far-Western Frog Tribe they had been in conflict with, the Tiger Tribe received a most notable relic: the hilt (and about six inches of broken blade) of Dragon's Wing, the Sword of Power. Apparently, when Fiery Tongue and the Dragon Emperor died, the shards of the shattered artifact flew to all directions, like shooting stars. A long ago chieftain found the Hilt in his faraway land, and made his Tribe strong using it. They called it "the Star Knife" in their language. (See below, *The Broken Sword* for more info.)

Heads



PC Opportunities

Depending upon the type of game, period of history, and *side* that one wants to play, PCs have a lot of opportunities in this Campaign in a Box.

- *Barbarian Chiefs*: Plotting, spying, and warring against the decadent Empire.
- *Bureaucrats*: Troubleshooting matters of import across the Empire for their Minister.
- *Court Aristocrats*: Attending upon the Emperor, skullduggery behind the arras, romances and duels.
- *Imperial Magistrates*: Riding a circuit, dispensing justice, performing executions; investigating crimes; investigating internal affairs matters between the Ministries.
- *Imperial Scouts*: Penetrating the Tiger Tribelands, recon, investigating non-criminal mysteries, riding border patrols.
- *Landed Aristocrats*: Managing the affairs of a palace or settlement; intriguing against neighbors and bureaucrats.
- *Questers*: See below, *The Broken Sword*.
- *Soldiers of the Empire*: Fighting Imperial enemies, foreign (Tigers) and domestic (rebels and bandits).
- *Traders and Adventurers*: Wandering from place to place, seeking profit and excitement.

NPC Backgrounds

Each character below has their most important *strengths* (generally positive qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) and *weaknesses* (generally negative qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) detailed. In descending order, the ranks are Master, Expert, Good, Average, and Poor. Depending upon the conception of what a character is like, any quality can be a strength or a weakness.

For example, suppose a character has "Spoiled Brat" as a quality. If it's ranked Average or above, it's a strength: the character always gets his own way, can wield undue influence by threatening to sic their Mommy or Daddy on others, might possess lots of cash or gadgets, and people may fawn over them, making life easy. But if the character has "Spoiled Brat (Poor)," this is a weakness: the character has led a pampered and sheltered life, rubs people the wrong way, and expects everyone to bend over backward to fulfill his most minor needs.

Since many game mechanics provide prose "benchmarks" to understand stat or skill levels, the ranked qualities below should be easily adaptable into any desired system. (Also see [the PDQ System](#) from [Atomic Sock Monkey Games](#).)

The example NPCs below can serve as friends, rivals, or foes to a PC group.

Imperials

*Priest-Mage **Dreamwalker**:* Dreamwalker was born a commoner (Average) of the Dragon Tribe. In his long-ago youth (Poor Aged), he displayed a strong talent for the Elements and the Forces. Today, he is one of the elite of the invisible world: an individual who is both an adept priest and a skilled magician (Master and Expert, respectfully).

*Lady **Evening Star**:* A Ram Aristocrat (Good), Evening Star has always displayed two things: a talent for music (Expert Minstrel) and wandering feet (Good Explorer). She has traveled the length and breadth of the Empire and beyond, singing her songs and playing her harp. Like many of her kinsfolk, she is an archer of renown (Expert).

*Bureaucrat **First Class Firesong**:* Though born a Boar Peasant (Good), Firesong easily passed the civil-service exam and the supplementary test to join the Ministry of Public Works (Good Bureaucrat). He is a skilled (Expert) Engineer - his specialty is surveying ruins, and can swing a Mace (Good) like a warrior-born.

*Prince **Hunting Jewel**:* Hunting Jewel is the younger son of the Rooster King (Expert Aristocrat), and has always been in the shadow of his older brother, Faithful Jewel, the Rooster Champion. To best serve his Tribe and the Empire, he became an Imperial Scout, and quickly rose through the ranks (Master). The Prince is Thoughtful (Expert), but has Humility Unbecoming a Rooster (Poor). He carries one of the Dragon Pearls ("Icy Owl").

*Lady **High Executioner White Flower**:* Like many of her fellow Dog Peasants (Good), White Flower chose to enter the Ministry of Justice. There, she showed aptitude for a difficult proficiency: executions. After a meteoric rise (Expert Bureaucrat), despite her youth, she was selected as the new High Executioner upon the retirement of her predecessor. Now she has a noble title -- even if there are those who snicker behind their hands at her lack of social graces (Poor Aristocrat). Champion of her Tribe, she wields Dog's Bite. She is a prodigy with a Longsword (Expert), even before the magical effects of her blade are taken into account.

*Prince **Wise Rider**:* High-ranking Aristocrat (Expert) of the Horse Tribe, Wise Rider is a perfect Knight (Master). He is especially Well-Regarded (Expert) across the Empire, from the Ministers down to the simplest dung-collector. This has made him a little Naïve (Poor) when confronted with dissimulation.

Tigers

*Shaman **Ant-lion**:* Ant-lion was bathed in the blood of his dying mother as he was born; indeed, this tragedy is what he ascribes as the source of his power as a Shaman (Master), especially at his age (Poor Beardless Youth).

*Shaman **Black Thorn**:* Black Thorn is a little Jealous (Poor) regarding Ant-lion. What came so easily to him required years of apprenticeship for her (Expert Shaman), and he still has the edge. However, she has an excellent Reputation (Expert) among the Tigers for her skillful spell-work and pleasant personality. She is also handy with a Sling (Good),

and proficient in Foraging (Good).

Smith Blood Dirge: Blood Dirge knows the incantations and formulae to smelt metals and forge steel; he is a Smith (Good). Part of this has to do with his understanding of how to find ore (Good Prospector) and take it from the earth (Good Miner). He is deadly with his iron-banded Staff (Good), and rather Strong (Good).

Chief Foolish Wolf: Don't let his name fool you: Foolish Wolf is incredibly Smart (Master), and a skilled Leader (Expert). Recently, he suffered a leg-wound in battle (Expert Axe) that is healing rather slowly (Poor Limp), but he refuses to see a shaman or make the requisite sacrifices himself -- others need healing magic more than he.

Trader Morning Cloud: Daughter of a Chieftain (Good), Morning Cloud is a skilled Warrior (Good), but an Expert Trader. She can also read and write several languages (Good Linguist), which she learned from her father's diverse slaves. Unfortunately, this makes her think she's Cosmopolitan, when she really isn't (Poor).

Chief Winged Tracker: Winged Tracker is the last of his sub-Tribe of the Owls (Poor Depression), and the greatest Hunter (Master) seen for decades among the Tiger Tribes. Few targets, man or beast, evade his Bow (Expert) or his Traps (Expert).

Items & Equipment

Most tools and weapons in this setting are of copper, bronze, or iron; there is forging of steel, but it's quite expensive. Armor is usually thick cloth, hide, or leather (from different animals, depending upon region), often with bone, wooden, or metal bits sewn or riveted upon it. Wealthy aristocrats might have an overlapping suit akin to the Roman *Lorica segmentata* or laced-together *lamellar* armor. Helmets and shields, usually of reinforced leather, are common.

Minor magic items are not uncommon, but neither are they very powerful. Examples of common items include good luck charms, fire resistance statues, water purifying bowls, containers that preserve food for a long time, arrow-deflecting shirts, that sort of thing. The small magic behind these items can be overcome with some difficulty, depending upon who, how much mundane/magical/mystical power is brought to bear, and in what manner this clash occurs.

Major magic items are rare, and powerful -- but nowhere near as potent as the Swords of Power. Here's one example:

Dragon Pearls

The One-Eyed Emperor tasked the Imperial Ministers of Rites and Intelligence to develop a communications system akin to that shared by the Swords. What they came up with was the Dragon Pearl -- in actuality, an egg-sized lump of smooth ivory, infused with mighty spells. It takes three years of constant enchantment for a Pearl to go from raw materials to magic item.

There are eleven Dragon Pearls in existence, each has its own name, and the Emperor or Empress determines who bears them (in addition to him- or herself) at any time. When something is drawn upon its surface with a special alchemical ink, the Pearl absorbs the ink and transmits it to a single other Pearl, which can then write out the message on a flat, blank paper (or wooden, in a pinch) surface.

Events & Possible Story Arcs

While any era of the Empire could be the setting for play (receiving the Swords, founding and rise of the Empire, any of the wars with the Tigers, the Rooster Coup, the destruction of Dragon's Wing, the One-Eyed Emperor's Glorious Reconstruction, etc.), the suggested period is that of the discovery of the Broken Sword's Hilt.

The Broken Sword

The Tiger Tribe has discovered the Hilt of the Broken Sword -- also known as the "Star Knife" -- and is assembling a band of their best to retrieve the other shards and have the Celestial Crows reforge it into a Sword for them. The Empire has discovered this from omens and spirits, and has pulled-together a group of their own for the same reasons.

Powers of the Star Knife: The Knife is preternaturally sharp, and permits the holder to see, speak with, and touch spirits as if he were a priest or shaman. The ghost of Fiery Tongue is bound to it. He will aid Tigers seeking the other shards and hinder/haunt Imperials if it falls into their hands, usually through Blood-oriented means: increasing or decreasing health, endurance, ferocity, anger, or sadness. The High Chief's ghost can fight other ghosts, if necessary.

Hilt



Playing the Imperial Side

If the PCs are agents of the Empire ("the Dragon Riders"), they will probably be a crack team assembled by the Emperor himself (in his role as the Minister of Intelligence), though they may not have open sanction. Indeed, the possibility that the Tigers might recover all the pieces of Dragon's Wing would cause panic in the streets of every kingdom. As the Emperor is a subtle man, what he considers a "crack team" may seem a bit odd to observers.

Within the boundaries of the Empire, PCs -- especially those with history, status, or occupations that warrant it -- may have some benefits when operating. They may come across side-issues like border-raiding, provincial Tribal altercations, or nascent coups that they may feel honor-bound to resolve. However, if they enter the Tiger Tribelands (disguised as traders), they'll need to play things a lot closer to the chest -- but may learn more about theses barbarians, not the least part of which is the build-up of forces for invasion.

Use the Tigers from *NPC Backgrounds* as their opposite numbers ("the Tiger Walkers").

Playing the Tiger Side

If the PCs are the Tiger Walkers, they will probably have grown up together as part of a tight-knit clan that has ties to the current High Chief. Given the intention to invade next year, the High Chief will probably want to use the Tiger Walkers to both perform some reconnaissance *and* seek the rest of the Broken Sword. The potential benefits from having a Sword of Power on the Tiger side of the war cannot be overlooked. They are sent as a clan because they will know each other's strengths and weaknesses, and have a substantial degree of interpersonal loyalty.

Within the Tribelands, the PCs will normally have total freedom of movement. They may come across side-issues like Imperial sallies into their lands, sub-Tribal clan disputes, or rival Chiefs who are not supportive of the invasion, which they may feel must be addressed. However, once they enter the Empire (disguised as traders), they'll need to deal with the overwhelming social structures, language differences, and "civilized" customs.

Use the Imperials from *NPC Backgrounds* as the Dragon Riders in this case.

Establishing the Party

Imperial

Ministerial Summons: Imperial characters are summoned to the presence of the Imperial Minister for Intelligence (aristocrats will realize this means "the Emperor") on Dragon Isle, from wherever they are -- home, palace, foreign inn while on a trade mission, prison, etc.

The Interview: The heroes are told that a small band of Tigers have found the Hilt of the Broken Sword, and are seeking the six other shards of the blade. The Imperial understanding was that the weapon had been totally destroyed. The omens grow murky after this -- but it is thought they seek to reforge the blade. The PCs' mission is to recover all the shards *and* the Hilt, get it reforged by the Celestial Crows at Fate's Forge, bring the restored Dragon's Wing back to the Emperor, and keep the entire operation quiet.

How?: The most adept priests and magicians of the Ministry of Rites have determined a short list of places that the shards *should* or *could* be in (see below), now that they know what they're looking for. Additionally, characters will be given supplies for a long journey, free repairs or upgrades to their gear, traveling papers so that they can move freely through the kingdoms, and one last thing that should only be used in an emergency: an Imperial seal.

Why us?: "I have my reasons for my choices, as well as my reasons for overlooking your insolence. Let us say there are omens, and that we are playing a deep game with fate."

Tigers

Star-Knife Bearer: One of the PCs is the Tiger who received this potent piece of tribute from the far-Western Chief Digging Youth for transport to the High Chief. If any PC is a shaman, they will know that the weapon is potent, and will easily be able to contact the bound ghost of Fiery Tongue and find out more. If no PC is a shaman, he or she will start to have dream-meetings with Fiery Tongue until an NPC shaman figures out what's what. Then the knife-wielder will be able to communicate with the ghost while waking.

The High Chief's Commands: The PCs' kinsman, High Chief Bloody Hand, once apprised of the nature of the Star-Knife, will quickly decide to have them gather the rest of the pieces and have the Crows make it anew into a Tiger Sword. Additionally, the characters should pay attention to any Imperial defenses they see on their journeys.

How?: The ghost bound to the knife can indicate either by pointing to a map or by physical "tugs" in the direction of the other shards (stronger with proximity). Bloody Hand will provide PCs with supplies for a long journey, free repairs to their gear, and ideas and aid for methods for penetrating the Empire (as a delegation of emissaries, a small group of traders, disguising themselves as Imperial citizens, etc.).

Why us?: "I trust you, as we are bound with ties of blood and marriage, clan to clan. Do not fail me, or our people."

Seeking the Shards

The shards of the Broken Sword can be sought in any order, depending of course on the PCs' origin, proximity, and choice.

A. Mantis Valley: (Northern Tribelands) One shard flew to the far north of the Tiger Tribelands, where it pierced a pregnant mantis. The magic of the Sword leaked into the insect, permitting her to survive and thrive. She gave rise to a preternaturally large breed of praying mantises. The colony of ferocious cougar-sized bugs still makes its home around the huge, dried exoskeleton of their ancestress.

B. Reed's Mine: (Hound's Highlands) This shard is buried deep in a vein of ore within a silver mine, one that has been prone to collapses for centuries. Indeed, it is currently closed and unworked. While the main workings are still accessible, the shaft containing the face has been sealed off since the time of the Broken Sword. Folk songs are still sung about the dozen miners that died within, and how their hungry ghosts yet stalk the tunnels.

C. Screaming Pine: (Ramswood) The wind whips past the high top of this tree (the tallest in the Empire; 500 feet!); this, combined with the dying cries of those who've attempted to climb it, give it its sobriquet. No climber has *ever* climbed up past 275 feet, thus, only one being has ever seen the shard that quivers in the trunk at 457 feet -- a Celestial Crow who lives at the top.

Her name is Horned Moon, and will only physically interfere with climbers if they are rude, blasphemous, or arrogant. She will, however, heckle and distract anyone who climbs above 250 feet. If the heroes manage to wrest the shard from the tree, she will speak to them politely. First, she will tell them that the Broken Sword can only be remade if *all* of the shards are present at Fate's Forge. She will then answer one question for each PC, to the best of her mystical, immortal ability. Finally, she will ask them to pass a message onto her brethren at Fate's Forge ("The time is nigh; seek me between the stars"), and then rocket up into the sky.

D. Hermit's Hill: (Horsesteppe) Inside a dug-out hole in the side of a hill lives a hermit. Hermits have always lived in that hill, since time immemorial. Well, not exactly. *One hermit* has lived in that hill all this time. Trotting Sun does not need to eat -- only drink -- and gains all his nourishment from the tiny creek running in front of his hideaway, due to the magic of the shard that is completely buried within the headboard of his bed. (He is unaware of the shard.)

He's quite mad. For centuries, Trotting Sun's been obsessively tracing through dream visions the family trees of, well, *everybody*, and his hole has several storage chambers of scrolls stored in clay pots. Frighteningly, the genealogies are both accurate and fairly current (within two years). He is supplied with ink, brushes, candles, flints, and steels by the local Horse priests, in accordance with longstanding Imperial Ministry of Rites orders.

Trotting Sun will welcome visitors by full name and the names of their parents, all eight grandparents, and any children they have as of two years ago. He can answer any questions (at extreme length) about genealogy, general or specific. He insists that visitors can see him only every other day, however, and hints that a gift of wine would be appreciated. However, if anyone attempts to steal anything he owns (and he may consider the shard his once he knows of it), he will fight back. Granted, he's an old, old man, but once, he was a Horse warrior and priest (count both as still Good), and he *does* know every one of their ancestors by name, and can call upon such to shame any intruders to death (the GM determines whether this is figurative or literal). His feelings can be assuaged by new genealogical information, gossip about marriages and children, stories about notable heroes within a character's lineage, or *any* information about the Celestial Crow Tribe. Note that Trotting Sun is not particularly prejudiced against Tigers; this could be seen as part of his madness, from an Imperial perspective.

Furthermore, this is an excellent place for the opposing team to show up.

E. Golden Bay: (Boar Coast) A shard is buried inside the shell of a gigantic clam on the bottom of Golden Bay (100'

down, 1 mile offshore). When the moon is full, the clam sings, and the surrounding water glimmers gold. Many sailors know of the golden waters (thus the name of the bay). What most people don't know is that while the clam sings, the waters in its immediate vicinity -- about 20' radius -- are as breathable as air. The wreckage of six ships surrounds the clam, forming a sort of shelter around it, which was used around seventy-five years ago as a smuggler's storehouse. If the clam is not killed, it will continue provide breathable, even if the shard is removed.

The only person who knows of this mystery is Crazy Stingray, an elderly (Poor Aged) Sailor (Average) and Smuggler (Expert) who was once cabin boy on a pirate ship. Omens and spirits will indicate to the PCs that Crazy Stingray is the key to recovering the shard on the Boar Coast; the trick is convincing him to tell them what he knows. (Perhaps he's been imprisoned, and the Dragon Riders can use their Imperial seal to free him; maybe there's a load of treasure down there that he needs the help of the Tiger Walkers to recover. . .)

Furthermore, like Hermit's Hill, this is an excellent place for the opposing team to show up.

F. Emperor's Skull: (Dragon Isle) The tiniest splinter of Dragon's Wing is embedded in the back of the One-Eyed Emperor's skull. However, until the discovery of the Hilt, no one knew -- or even suspected -- this. While recovery of this shard from Devoted to the Winds' Tomb (and remains) seems like it would be easy for the Dragon Riders, it's more complicated than that. To properly and legally go after the splinter, the Tomb must be purified, a process that takes a week. Those who will enter the Tomb must also be purified, which also takes a week that cannot be concurrent with the Tomb purification. Then, each of the many traps within must be disabled on the way from the entrance to the burial chamber. Next, a 24 hour, silent vigil must be held before the closed coffin of the Emperor; and another 24 hour vigil after it is opened. Then the skeleton's bones must be wrapped in individual pieces of cloth-of-gold. And so on, and so on. (The upshot is to do this all open and aboveboard, Dragon Riders will have to take a month to jump through hoops.)

Why not split up, or have some nameless functionary do the rituals and such to recover the splinter? If the GM wishes to permit this, that's fine -- but someone has to get the Splinter to the Dragon Riders, giving an excellent opportunity for the Tiger Walkers to ambush or waylay the courier. Otherwise, "the omens say that the one who will bear the Splinter must be the one who plucks it from the Emperor's skull."

On the other hand, a group after the splinter could just evade or bribe the ceremonial guards, break the Tomb's seals, risk the traps, fight off the honor guard of ghosts, jimmy the coffin, bust open the skull, take the splinter, and run away. (This is probably what any Tiger Walkers will have to do, anyway.) Of course, *anyone* caught doing something like this would be publicly tortured, then messily executed. The Emperor will disavow all knowledge of such a mission by the Dragon Riders, and may even be forced to set Imperial magistrates on their trail if they make a mess of things.

Then there's the One-Eyed Emperor's ghost to contend with.

Powers of the Splinter: The Splinter permits the holder to see, speak with, and touch spirits as if he were a priest or shaman. The ghost of Devoted to the Winds is bound to it. He will aid Imperials seeking the other shards and hinder/haunt Tigers if it falls into their hands, usually through Wind/Spirit-oriented means: summoning ghosts, causing windstorms, or creating mental delusions. The One-Eyed Emperor's ghost can fight other ghosts, if necessary.

If a group possesses both the Star-Knife *and* the Splinter, the two bound ghosts will start fighting. Indeed, their battle will take them far afield of the PCs, leaving both shards' powers inert for three days. On the third day, they will return, together, and both bend their powers to getting all of the shards to Fate's Forge, but they will not speak to the mortals on why they are in accord. (GM's option on what their decision is: whether to support the forging of two Swords, or just the Tiger Sword -- see below).

Crossing Paths

The Dragon Riders and the Tiger Walkers may very well cross paths on their respective paths. Do they fight? Do they strike a bargain (that's probably treason from the Imperial perspective)? Do they sit down for tea and cakes, then join together (definitely treason)?

Well, that's really up to the PCs and the GM, isn't it? Any way you look at it, though, the meeting should be *cool*.

Going to Fate's Forge

As noted in *Screaming Pine* above, the Celestial Crows will only remake the Broken Sword if all of the shards are present at Fate's Forge. Of course, this doesn't mean that they all have to be in possession of a single group. . . And, no doubt, if all of the other pieces make it to the volcano, the (surviving) members of the NPC group will show up there, too.

Until they reach the volcano's summit, the groups can beat merry hell out of one another all the livelong day. However, once they reach the edge of the crater, the Crows will appear, and inform both parties that they are now guests, and must show good manners (or else).

How many pieces of the Broken Sword a group possesses will have an effect on how the Crows respond to them (provided they are otherwise polite):

- *None of the Shards*: Pity and kind-hearted humor.
- *Some of the Shards*: Rude speech in an informal mode; typical Crow-speak.
- *All of the Shards*: Exceedingly polite and formal tones, upon the resolution of prophecy.

Also, the characters who transmit Horned Moon's message to the Crows will be received politely, and each given a small enchanted item as a gift (probably not a weapon or armor, but a nifty little tool or object that fits their character, profession, or Tribe).

Each character will be asked three questions: 1) should the Sword be reforged?; 2) Should it be reforged for the Dragons or the Tigers?; and 3) if the only way the Sword could be reforged is for the other Tribe, should it be remade? The Crows will ask the characters to expand upon their answers.

Sword(s) (Re)Forged

Depending upon how the GM wishes to tally these "votes" and the reasons behind them, this can give rise to two different outcomes. An important note here is that the Crows originally forged the Swords of Power to aid the underdogs -- the Six Tribes -- versus an overwhelming force -- the Tiger Tribes. Now that the Empire is powerful, are the Tigers the underdogs? And what have the two ghosts bound to the shards decided?

The two outcomes are:

1. *One Sword*: Either Dragon's Wing is remade (with all of its original powers) or a new Sword is created: Tiger's Fang (see below), and given to the respective party.
2. *Two Swords*: The Crows forge two Swords, one for each group: Dragon's Wing and Tiger's Fang. If this option is chosen, Dragon's Wing loses its ability to turn off other Swords of Power.

The creation of a Sword of Power takes some time; this would be a good opportunity for the PCs and NPCs to interact, under the bond of guests of the Celestial Crows. Perhaps they will find common ground, romance, or new hatred. Who knows?

After the Sword is (or Swords are) handed over, three of the Celestial Crows will fly away, straight up, at great speed. The remaining three will release the characters from their bonds of guest-hood, bid them farewell, and vanish. The two parties are then left standing there, looking at one another, one or both groups holding a Sword of Power. Now what?

Tiger's Fang: Tiger's Fang can speed the healing tenfold of anyone touched with the flat of the blade, and the wielder never tires -- while he still requires food and drink, he never needs sleep. The wielder of this Sword is nearly always initially seen as "polite" by the denizens of the spirit world (he should still know the proper and polite rituals to be truly effective, however). When held, the Sword-bearer cannot die from wounds taken in combat (though he can die

after his last enemy falls).

If Tiger's Fang is the only Sword forged, its wielder gains the ability to turn off other Sword's unique abilities, once held by Dragon's Wing.

Aftermath

So, what do the characters do with the Sword? Fight their opposite numbers? Join forces? Attempt to integrate the Tiger Tribes into the Empire? Lead the armies to clash next year? Attempt to take the Dragon Throne, or the High Chieftainship?

Just like in *Crossing Paths* above, that's really up to the GM and PCs. In any case, it's a whole new campaign.

Stand-off



Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

THEME: Order/Stasis vs. Chaos/Change

What makes a theme of Order vs. Chaos interesting is that both outlooks can be either good or evil, depending upon how you look at them. Order can be law, and Chaos lawlessness, or the former can be suppression, and the latter, liberty. This permits more complex issues to be raised in a game, beyond basic "White Hat" and "Black Hat" determinations. Monty of the Python Tribe pointed this out in *Life of Brian*:

Reg: All right, but apart from the sanitation, medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the fresh water system and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?

Attendee: Brought peace?

Reg: Oh, peace -- shut up!

But on the other hand, look at what O'Brien says in *1984*: "If you want a vision of the future, Winston, imagine a boot stamping on a human face forever."

THEME: Faction Politics

With so many Tribes and Ministries operating within the Empire in general, and the Dragon Court in specific, plenty of social and political machinations can take place. Politics makes strange bedfellow: no doubt this statement is both figurative and literal. Entire campaigns could be set around the business of running the Empire -- the aristocracy against the peasantry, Ministry against Ministry, Tribe against Tribe, Ministry against Tribe, peasantry against Ministry, and so forth.

Just consider all that would have to happen for, say, the Dog King to build a new port on the coast of Hound's Highlands. There's the Ministries of Rites, Revenues, and Public Works to deal with -- and the last is an instant conflict, because Public Works is under the command of the Boar King, who may be against having competition for his Tribe's sailors. The Dog King may try to gain the Throne's backing, by making the new port an Imperial naval yard, bringing in the Ministry of War. The War Minister, the Rooster King, might be more hip on building infantry and cavalry, rather than more ships. The Rooster's lover, a Ram dancer, may secretly offer his or her services to one of the pro-port factions, in an attempt to sway the Minister's opinions on the subject -- for a suitable fee of course! The fee might be the release of a Tiger Tribesman in Imperial Prison. . .

The easiest way to generate such a web of intrigue is first to assume nobody will be reasonable (at least until the PCs get involved). Then, pick a person, thing, or event to start with. Look and see who or what would oppose this person, thing, or event; and what sorts of actions they would take against it. Look for reactions to that action from the first party, and the effects that the second party's action has on third-parties. Determine *their* responses to the second party's action. Every so often, throw some money, sex, drugs, crime, or honor into the mix. Voila! Instant Byzantine factional politics.

Other Resources

- Bixby, Jerome. ["Mirror, Mirror,"](#) *Star Trek*, episode 39.
- Brust, Steven. The Vlad Taltos series (*Jhereg*, et al.) and the Khaavren Romances (*The Phoenix Guards*, et al.)
- [Chinese Zodiac](#).
- [Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon](#).
- Forward, Eve. *Villains By Necessity*.
- Gilbert & Sullivan, [The Mikado](#).
- [Hero](#).
- [The House of Flying Daggers](#).
- Hughart, Barry. *The Chronicles of Master Li and Number Ten Ox* (SFBC Omnibus; *Bridge of Birds*, et al.).
- Kane, Thomas. [GURPS China](#).
- ["Kung-Fu Crucible"](#) (and Peter Dell'Orto's follow-up articles, ["Martial Arts Styles for Mages"](#) and ["Magic in the Crucible"](#)).
- [Legalism \(philosophy\)](#).
- [Louis XIV of France](#) (Height of power).
- Modesitt, L.E. *The Magic of Recluce* (and sequels).
- Moorcock, Michael. [The Elric Saga](#).
- Morrison, Grant. *JLA: Earth 2*.
- Saberhagen, Fred. *The Complete Book of Swords*.
- Sakai, Stan. The *Usagi Yojimbo* comic book series.
- [Tengu](#).
- Tolkien, JRR. *The Lord of the Rings*.
- [Zu Warriors](#)

Ye Olde Majik Shoppe IV

Yet Another Five Odd, Strange and Just Plain Weird Magical Items

by K. David Ladage (with thanks to Chad Underkoffler)

Although the mystery surrounding [Kendalge](#)'s existence is one that may never be solved to the satisfaction of all that would care to question it, the fact remains that [his signature](#) appears on 23 treaties enforced to this day, and [his legacy](#) has been etched into the annals of time. In other words, whether he existed or not, he is not likely to be forgotten anytime soon.

It is often debated of Kendalge: which is more important, the man or the myth? Although this is surely a matter of taste, one historian said it thusly: *One cannot have the Church of Myonisis without Myonisis the Benevolent; but Myonisis the Benevolent can (and did!) exist independent of her church. Therefore Myonisis the Benevolent is the more important element. As with Myonisis, the same is true of Kendalge: one cannot have the legacy without the man; but the man can exist independent of the legacy.*

The counter argument to all of this usually begins: *One cannot prove the existence of Kendalge; the existence of his legacy is self evident . . .* In other words, his legacy is all that we possess; in order to approach the man, we must study the legacy intently.

Below are five more glimpses into that unique legacy.

Quicksilver Spheres

According to the diaries of several friends of Queen Chelsea V, when she first saw her husband with a large velvet case filled with small, translucent, white-crystalline spheres (each with their own dimpled compartment), she asked what they were. His answer was "They are insurance. I'm saving them for a rainy day." Since that time, when she would write or speak of the delicate items, she would call them *Rainy Day Spheres*.

It was Halvord, Kendalge's faithful apprentice, that would dub them Quicksilver Spheres, and that is the name most scholars use today. Although Her Majesty would never discover the secrets hidden in those fragile pieces of glass, Halvord would . . . and even according to the writings of such nay-sayers as Bravarix Calyuran, Halvord would use these spheres in at least three of his more noteworthy adventures.

Halvord discovered that the two-inch orbs were half-filled with mercury (a material that Kendalge seemed to use quite often in his enchantments, see [Bauble of Time](#)). The spheres use the mercury as a magical storage medium¹. In fact, in these items, mercury is being used to store many, *many* spells, allowing them to be released later at full

¹ It is not known how Kendalge managed to use mercury (a.k.a. *quicksilver*) as a medium for enchantment. Other magi have attempted to use the elusive metallic fluid for enchantment with limited success. Metals are (usually) excellent conductors of magical energy; witness the abundance of magical swords and armors throughout history.

Enchanters agree, however, that mercury (to put it mildly) is *less than ideal*. In fact, in those odd times when an enchanter can get quicksilver to absorb an enchantment, it will not last. It would seem that Kendalge was not only able to overcome this limitation, he used the material to hold spells in stasis. Thus, the spell would be completely cast -- all required energies poured in. Once the sphere was shattered, all of the magical energy would be released, and the spells would go off just as if the mage that placed them within the sphere were standing their casting it. Since there is no way to know what spells are within the spheres, this can be a bit of a gamble.

strength with no expenditure of magical energy on the part of the wielder.

The limit on the number of spells that the orbs can absorb, if there is one, is not known. The most that Halvord ever used was thirty-one. When the orb is broken, it will explode, releasing all of the magical energy stored within it. Each and every spell that was cast into the sphere is cast immediately, released simultaneously; the spells will target whatever is closest to them at the time.

According to the notes that Halvord left to his eldest son, there were over 300 of the spheres originally created by Kendalge. He knew of approximately 150 that had been used, and of another 100 that had been primed with spells, leaving 50 *blank parchments* ready to each accept untold numbers of fully-powered spells.

It is speculated that these spheres were used as the centers for the [Baubles of Time](#). Some speculate that the Baubles were Kendalge's first attempt at the spheres; others feel that his work with the spheres lead to the creation of the Baubles. Either way, the spheres are identical, with the exception of the fact that the Baubles use clear crystal, and the spheres use white-crystal. What significance this, or the strange spider-like case the Baubles are in, has is not known.

Ring Of Kendalge

Is there a ring that was enchanted by Kendalge to identify him to his other enchantments? Although no writing that can be traced to Kendalge suggests such an item existed, there are many that believe that there must have been one.

If the Ring does exist, then it would be a powerful item indeed. According to the early writings of Atlas d'La Raven, Chancellor to Empress Zoheret, this item would not only identify the wearer as being Kendalge to the various creations of the Master Enchanter, some evidence (he claimed) suggested that the ring allowed the wearer to keep track of the location and status of all of the items he created. In other words -- to find the ring, is to find (and control!) *all* of the magical works of Kendalge. Even Gemmomarmor, and the famed [Naos Sanctum](#)².

Although not one scroll, book, or scrap of parchment dating from the Second Age claims such an item exists, there is more speculation as to the existence of the so-called Ring of Kendalge within sage-circles of the Third Age than any other item. No proof, yet many of those that study the exploits of the Master Enchanter suggest that this item *must* have existed; there had to be an item somewhere that identified Kendalge to his various creations.

Certainly, this item need not have been a ring -- some suggest that it could be a necklace, or a piece of clothing. But it seems obvious (to some) that *something* protected Kendalge from the wrath of his own creations. For example, some tales suggest that Kendalge drank wine with His Majesty, King Beaufort VII, from the famed [Chalices of Humility](#), yet suffered none of the magical effects that the cups imbued upon the wine. There is the odd story of Kendalge's wife attempting to use the [Jewel of the Soul](#) on him, and it failing miserably. Other tales have individual items to identify Kendalge to other creations, such as the fabled rings (or amulets) that supposedly controlled Kendalges army of [Guarder Snakes](#).

It is, in fact, the tale of the so-called central control ring for the [Guarder Snakes](#) that led the infamous Atlas d'La Raven to commission no less than three quests in search of the Ring. His research led him to believe that the ring was, in fact,

² There is a story of the ring that was told in the courts not long after Zoheret was removed from power. In this story, Atlas d'La Raven not only discovered the ring, but then traveled North into the territories that Kendalge once controlled. Using the ring, he was able to call forth the [Naos Sanctum](#) and enter its hallowed halls. The story claims that he has been using the fortress to collect the rest of Kendalge's creations -- making each appearance of the Sanctum a point where Atlas d'La Raven would go to find one of the magical items, then (once he had it) disappear back into the nothingness where the Sanctum rests.

This story would later become the basis for several popular plays, then operas, where Atlas d'La Raven would return in an attempt to take control of the Empires of the Third Age . . . failing, of course, due to some popular heroic figure of the day (or, as in one variation, due to

Signet Ring that Kendalge used while he served as Lord Protector of the Northern Regions. Lord Bravarix Calyuran (predictably) wrote: *This is when the true madness of Atlas d'La Raven began to become obvious, even to the likes of Empress Zoheret*. It is true that Atlas d'La Raven was dismissed from his duties shortly after the third such crusade; but many still believe he was successful.

the return of Kendalge himself to reclaim his property).

Silver Chain

The silver chain is a thin, delicate, 24-inch silver necklace with six tiny rubies, and six tiny emeralds -- each stone alternating color, placed every two inches. It has no clasp; the wearer simply puts it on over their head. And it has been the cause of countless deaths and untold misfortune over the ages.

There are several legends of items that Kendalge enchanted that either did not turn out the way that he had hoped, or had repercussions he had not foreseen. The Silver Chain is one of those items (see also Theodore's Sword, below). Kendalge enchanted the Chain as a gift for an early lover (3). The chain was supposed to grant the wearer more confidence, removing self doubts and low self-esteem. The result was, to be blunt, disastrous. Where Kendalge had wanted to remove self doubts, the chain instead removes all doubts. The wearer becomes completely convinced that every thought that enters their head is the absolute gospel truth. This inevitably leads to extreme paranoia. And, with the bolstered confidence they have just received, the wearer quickly begins to believe that they are the only one that can correct the situation . . .

³ The legend goes that Kendalge crafted the chain, enchanted it, and presented it as a gift for his lover just as he was to leave on stately business. His lover (whose name varies in the telling of the tale) was a charming woman who was from a tattered past (one in which she had been abused, physically and emotionally). Her past left her with little self-esteem and a personality that rendered her nearly powerless; she would cling onto other people to establish her own worth.

After Kendalge left, she wore her new gift with pride. After a short while, she was sure he was never going to return. She was confident that this was his loss, however, and managed to seduce one of Kendalge's servants. She began using the resources of the Kendalge estate -- feeling that this was what he had left her with, it must be hers. It was not long before she had gotten enough of the servants and staff alarmed that they sent word to the court for Kendalge's return. When she discovered this, she accused them of treasonous acts, and began to threaten them. Her new lover turned on her, and this was too much for her to take.

By the time Kendalge returned (in most tellings, this all took place in less than two weeks, never more than a month) she had become an emotional shell of a woman. Kendalge removed the necklace, but it was too late -- the damage had been done. The fate of the Silver Chain is never described.

Theodore's Sword

Theodore was the eldest member of the adventuring group that included Kendalge and his love, Orlantha. He was, as history has stated hundreds of times, the greatest swordsman of his generation. But as the exploits of the little group were reaching their peak, Theodore was well past his. His body was beginning to fail. Kendalge had a tremendous respect for

⁴ According to the writings of Ghorik Shadowvale, Earl of Gyersetok, the magics that are on the sword making all detection of enchantment impossible were very important to Kendalge. Theodore was a nobleman, and was often finding himself in duels over the honor of some fair maiden (at least three times over the honor of Orlantha). In such duels, as the practice was at that time, enchanted blades and armor were not

Theodore, and so created the sword that Theodore would use for the last seven years of his life. If the various scraps of information that Kendalge left behind dealing with the sword are to be taken at face value, then Theodore would not discover that he had received this "gift" until the bitter end.

The sword is a rather simple, but solid, heavy, and well crafted thrusting broadsword. The blade is of a dark, almost blood-toned steel. Normal spells of detection will show no enchantment on the blade (4). However, the blade has one very powerful, very potent, and quite unique enchantment: when using the sword, an illusion covers the wielder, making it appear that all of their movements are reversed, like a mirror image.

If the wielder of Theodore's Sword thrusts to the right, anyone that sees them will see a thrust to the left. Obviously, any attempted block to stop this perceived threat will be (at best) useless and (at worst) counterproductive.

It was Kendalge's wish that the effects of Theodores sword never be known. Most of Kendalge's notes, and the sword, disappeared shortly after Theodore's death. The only four remaining scrolls that describe the sword are a part of the collection of Sir Chaddwyke Earl of Overcliffe.

permitted. Thus, Kendalge fashioned a sword that could be used to protect his friend, without others being any wiser. Additionally, Theodore was a proud and knightly man. He personally felt that enchanted blades were for lesser swordsmen.

But Kendalge's secret was not an easy one to keep. On those four remaining scrolls that describe the sword, it states that often, following a duel, people would speak of how he had thrust this way, or parried that . . . and the descriptions would not match Theodore's own recollections. For a long while, he simply accepted this as the faulty memories of people caught up in the moment. But after a time, as his age continued to erode his considerable skill, he made what should have been a fatal mistake in a duel against Lord Charles of the East Winds; Charles obviously saw the opening, but thrust the wrong way.

It was obvious. Theodore backed off, and laid his sword down. Charles accepted the forfeit and left the listfield. So, after seven years of using the sword, he confronted Kendalge. Kendalge stalled at first, but was unable to lie to his trusted friend. This betrayal (as Theodore saw it) was more than he could take. To think of the number of men he had bested over the years -- not due to his own skill and determination, but due to unforgivable deceit and trickery -- was too much for him to take. He took ill shortly after the conversation; and died within six months, a broken man.

Kendalge preserved those scrolls, he claims, as a constant reminder of the very real consequences of deceit. This fatal mistake, early in his career, did much to shape him into the man that would one day advise Kings with wisdom and temperance.

Utter-Scale

Anyone that has read the tales of Kendalge is instantly aware of the many talents he possessed. He was, of course, the greatest enchanter of his (or any other) time. But he was much more than that. For example, he was an accomplished Bard; he was a musician (playing the Dulcimer, Lute and Oboe); he was a decent ballroom dancer, a fine chess player, and often invented new games of skill and chance (such as King's Crossing, and Nine-Dragons).

But even if all of these things are of no surprise, some people still find it hard to accept that Kendalge was also an alchemist. Granted, this was not his true calling -- there were many much more accomplished alchemists in his day and since. Still, as an alchemist, he recognized the need for precise measurements in the accounting of alchemical compounds.

⁵ There is a children's story concerning this item states that the scales were once given to a woman that was courted by two men. The first man loved the woman with his whole heart; the other man, while he was fond of her, was more enthralled with the riches that her wealthy, land-owning, merchant of a father was promising in her dowry.

The first man wanted to prove that his love for the maiden was greater than the second man's love, and so asked that she hold the handle of the Utter-Scale while he and the competing suitor held onto the plates. He instructed her to speak the words "love for me" so that the scale would measure, within the two men, which one had the greater love for the

To that end, he put his enchanting skills to work when he created the Utter-Scale. The scale is a small metal equilateral triangle, eight inches on a side. There is a small bulbous handle extending from one side of the triangle, and a six-foot long piece of thick, golden thread that extends from the opposing points of that side. Each thread is then secured to a small place of plate of dull gray metal.

This odd, and overly simple looking device is used to compare *anything* (5) about an object to the same quality in another object. After placing the plates so that they are in contact with two different objects and holding the handle so that the triangle extends above it, the holder then speaks clearly the quality that is to be measured. The triangle will then pivot on the handle and point towards the object that has a greater amount of the quality in question.

woman holding the scale.

However, instead, she looked at the man that gave her the scales, dead in the eye, and said "loved by me" whereupon the scales tipped towards the second man . . . the moral of the story being that it is not always what *you* want that matters in life.

Pyramid Review

Star Wars Miniatures: Rebel Storm

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Bill Slavicsek, Jeff Grubb, Jonathon Tweet, & Rob Watkins

Illustrated by Des Hanley, Greg Staples, & Stephen Tappin with Clark Mitchell

Cartography by Christopher West

Starter Set: 5½ By 8½-Inch Full Color 36-Page Rule Book, Two-Page Rules Summary, 34 By 22-Inch Full Color Double-Sided Battle Grid, Eight 5 By 7-Inch Terrain Tiles, Ten 1¼-Inch Tall Miniatures With Corresponding 2½ By 3½-Inch Full Color Stat Cards, One Sheet of Force & Damage Counters, & One 20-Sided Die; \$19.99

Booster Pack: Seven Random Miniatures; \$12.99

Since its debut in 2002, WizKids has dominated the Collectible Miniatures Game market they pioneered with two lines: *Marvel HeroClix* and *DC Helix*. No one came close to impinging upon their number one position, until Wizards of the Coast released first *Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures*, and then *Star Wars Miniatures: Rebel Storm*. And as we all know, if there is one license to trump them all, it is that of *Star Wars*.

As is standard for the CMG, *Star Wars Miniatures: Rebel Storm* comes in the starter set and booster pack format. It is in the game's Starter Set that you get all of the goodies: ten miniatures, a stat card for each, a large full-color Battle Grid (or map), eight full-color terrain tiles, the rulebook, a simple rules summary, and a miniatures set list. Each Booster adds another seven miniatures.

The miniatures come pre-painted and assembled in durable plastic, the average Rebel Trooper or Stormtrooper being roughly 1¼-inch high. The Starter Set includes two exclusive figures, "Luke Skywalker, Rebel" and "Darth Vader, Dark Jedi." Other figures in the Starter Set and all of those in the Boosters are selected randomly. The *Rebel Storm* set is comprised of 60 miniatures, divided equally into three factions: Rebel, Imperial, and Fringe, the latter being from *Star Wars'* underground and criminal underworld fraternities. The various figures from the Rebel and Imperial factions are what you would expect them to be: C-3PO, Han Solo, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and others from the Rebel faction, while Emperor Palpatine, Probe Droid, Grand Moff Tarkin, and so on from the Imperial faction. The only surprise is the inclusion of "Mara Jade, Emperor's Hand" in among the Imperial faction, since she does not appear in any of the original trilogy of films. Characters such as Boba Fett, the Ewok, Greedo, and Lando Calrissian all belong to the Fringe faction.

The miniatures are also rated by their rarity: common, uncommon, rare, and very rare. In general, the larger or more important the figure, the more animated and rarer it is. The very rare characters include (Rebel) Commando on Speeder Bike, Princess Leia, Captive, Darth Vader, Sith Lord, Scout Trooper on Speeder Bike, Boba Fett, and Jabba the Hutt. Each figure has its name, set number, and rarity marked on its base.

All figures have a stat card. These note a character's Hit Points (10 points for characters such as the Ewok or

Stormtrooper, 40 for Luke Skywalker, Rebel, and 140 for Darth Vader, Dark Jedi); Defense, Attack, and Damage ratings. Some characters also have Special Abilities, such as the Ewok's "Swarm," which gives them a bonus when making a melee attack en masse. More powerful characters have more impressive Special Abilities. Darth Vader, Dark Jedi, for example, can make two attacks each phase with his Double Attack. He also possesses Force Powers, which in his case are Force Grip ("I find your lack of faith disturbing" -- his only ranged attack) and Lightsaber Sweep, which lets him strike all adjacent characters. Like all characters with Force Powers, he can also expend his Force Points to re-roll bad die rolls or to temporarily move faster. In addition, a character with Commander Effects can influence his allies on the battlefield.

The large thick paper Battle Grid or map is double-sided, marked in 1-inch squares on both sides. One side is otherwise plain, except for the starting positions marked for two, three, or four player games. On the other side is the more impressive deck plan of the Death Star, which includes the notable locations of the Hanger, Flight Control Center, Detention Center, and Tractor Beam Reactor Coupling shaft. The eight Terrain Cards, also in full-color, detail further locations such as Hanger with X-Wing Fighter, Turbolift Cluster, and the Shaft.

The rulebook is very clearly written and obviously done with a young audience in mind; the minimum recommended age for **Star Wars Miniatures: Rebel Storm** is 12 years old. The rules are very clear and easy to understand, with lots of examples and diagrams as well as a very helpful glossary. In fact, with the aid of the Rules Summary, the game is so easy to grasp and understand that the average gamer could unpack a Starter Set and be playing within the space of five minutes.

Play is itself simple. Players take turns to activate two characters. Once activated, a character can either move and attack, attack and move, or move twice. Attacking involves rolling the die and adding in the character's Attack value. If the result is equal to or higher than a target's Defense stat, then the attacker's Damage stat is deducted from the target's Hit Points. A Force Power or Special Ability can be used instead of an attack.

Set-up for the game is a little more complicated, but not needlessly so. Players build squads of characters on an equal number of points, usually 100. One side builds a squad of Rebel and Fringe characters, while other player creates a squad of Imperial and Fringe characters. Each side reveals their squad and sets them up at opposite ends of the Death Star map. They then go at it until one squad beats the other.

The more advanced rules suggest all-Fringe character squads, and Fringe versus Fringe skirmishes. Rules also cover the effects of the terrain and obstacles aboard the Death Star map as well as using the Terrain Tiles on both sides of the battle Grid sheet. Placement of the Terrain Tiles can also be competitive. In a three-way skirmish, winning is determined not by wiping everyone else out, but by scoring points for the characters eliminated. Other suggestions include Team Play and playing games straight out of a purchased box, in this instance ignoring factions and Special Abilities for Unique characters.

More interesting still is the idea of special scenarios, designed using the components of the Starter Set and a wide variety of the miniatures in the **Rebel Storm** set. It would be just as easy to use scale maps from other games and manufacturers, or indeed for a player to create his own. The only scenario included in the rules is "Rescue the Princess," in which a Rebel faction boards the Death Star and attempts to break Princess Leia out of her detention cell, get her back to the ship, and -- of course -- disable the tractor beam. Naturally, the Imperial squad does its best to stop them. It is a pity that just the one scenario is included, but it does highlight the fact that the participants need to have access to all of the miniatures in the **Rebel Storm** set and more to create or play them.

There are three aspects to consider in buying **Star Wars Miniatures: Rebel Storm**. First is its collectible factor and the investment necessary to get all of it. The very rare figures are roughly twice as rare as the rare ones, and it took an acquaintance roughly 16 Boosters to obtain most of the characters that he wanted. The rest he picked up as singles. Even then, he opined that he got a lot of cheap targets, or Ewoks and Jawas. On the plus side, that gave him lots of Stormtroopers and Rebel Troopers, which are great for use with the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game** -- another suggested use for **Star Wars Miniatures: Rebel Storm**. Of course, many of the named heroes from this set are not going to be as useful in this regard, as players prefer to create their own characters rather than play Luke Skywalker or Princess Leia. Hopefully, a future expansion will give more Fringe characters which would be the most likely source for such

characters.

Finally ***Rebel Storm*** can be used to play out and fight many of the most memorable scenes from the first trilogy of films. Already the publisher has published ***Ultimate Miniatures: Rebel Storm***, an aid in that endeavor. Of course, players will need access to all of the characters in the set and multiples of many of its common and uncommon characters.

This is also a problem right from the start. Even with a Starter Set and a Booster, it is not really possible to play any other mode than Out of the Box games. There are not enough figures to create 100 point squads of any faction, and at least another Booster is a necessity.

Get past this problem, and what you have in ***Star Wars Miniatures*** is a fun, playable skirmish game. The game is very easy to learn, and putting a squad together lends itself to various permutations when considering the various Special Abilities available. And of course, if you are of a certain age, then ***Star Wars Miniatures: Rebel Storm*** should speak to both the gamer and the geek inside you.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Tutankhamen

Published by [Out of the Box Publishing](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Art by John Kovalic

70 artifact tiles, pyramid, 90 coins, 6 tokens, reference sheet, rules; \$14.99

Many historical questions persist about Egypt's so-called "boy king," supposedly dead at the age of 18, but the one that holds the most fascination for folks is: Where did *Tutankhamen* leave all his loot? Two to six players take the role of archaeologists who gather treasure and, not as stupid as all those others who have been cursed by countless mummies before them, make sure to pay homage to Tut by giving him their money.

The object of the game is to be the first player to give up all his coins.

The game is played on a long, meandering strip of tiles that lead up to a pyramid. Each tile shows a treasure, with the number on the tile indicating how many tiles are in that set and how much that set is worth. Along the way you can also gather bags of gold and pharaoh tiles, and sitting atop the pyramid is the King Tut tile. Players start their pawns at the end of the path, going toward the monument. You begin the game with tribute coins -- the more players, the fewer coins you'll have to get rid of.

Movement isn't random. Your pawn may go to any point in the path, and the player collects the tile he lands on and places it in front of him. He may not backtrack, so any tiles he passes up are lost to him. Those coming up behind him may still land on unclaimed tiles. If the rearmost player passes up one or more tiles when he moves, no one will ever get them so they're removed from play.

If you complete a set, you score it immediately. A set is done when all the tiles are accounted for -- one or more players have picked up all the tiles, and/or the unclaimed tiles have been removed from the end of the path. If you have the most tiles from that set, you get the points. If you tie for the most counters with one or more other players, you all get half the set's value.

Tiles that show bags of gold may be used to buy (read: steal) a tile from another player. That other player in turn may deposit a tribute coin. The other wild card . . . er, counter . . . is the pharaoh tiles. These may be turned in as part of an artifact set during scoring, giving you a better chance to win the set. The Tut piece does the same thing, but you can deposit an extra coin upon collecting it. Even if you go to the end of the path, you continue to score for tiles collected up to that point as other players finish the sets.

When you redeem artifacts, your score is how many coins you may place in tribute into the pyramid (there's a little piggy-bank sort of slot on the back of the tomb). If you give up the last of your coins, you win immediately. If everyone finishes the path without ditching all their money, the person who contributed the most wins.

The artwork is pretty straightforward and functional, which is really all you can ask for. The presentation of the game is a far more important visual factor, and while the equipment is once again a bit lavish (and adds about five bucks to the price of other Out of the Box games of similar size), it's delicious fun to play with. All the coins, the bank-like nature of the container, the bright and colorful tiles . . . they're all so pleasing. It's kind of neat being able to build the winding path of counters, but it makes starting a new game a pain in the ass. Don't bother to place them upside down

to randomize them -- it's even more time-consuming having to flip them up when you're done, and no one's really going to gain an advantage from seeing the tokens as they're laid out.

While some of the balance issues involved -- deciding what to keep and what you can afford to leave behind -- aren't all that new, the method of putting it out to the players is. It's visually striking, and leveling out all the factors that must be taken into account in your strategy make the game anything but boring. The rules could explain the timing better (it's easy for multiple sets to come up for scoring at once). The use of the tribute coins isn't really needed, but the kids will get a kick out of it. Leaving victory up to whoever loses their last coin instead of the person with the highest score also makes for a faster game. Out of the Box finds its success in strange and esoteric places, and it looks like **Tutankhamen** still hasn't finished giving up all his treasures.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Death Of A Lost Man: The Killing of President Garfield

*"Mister Garfield's been shot down, shot down, shot down
Mister Garfield's been shot down low
Lawd, I knew the President was supposed to be at the depot that day
And we just wouldn't believe he was shot
But we ran over there
And there was so many folks around we couldn't see him."
-- Johnny Cash and Jack Elliott, "Mister Garfield" (1965)*

James A. Garfield, the last President of the United States to be born in a log cabin (so far), was in many ways made President by a series of flukes. A deadlocked 1880 Republican convention in Chicago turned to former Union General and Ohio Congressman Garfield as an unknown compromise candidate. With only tepid support from the "Stalwart" pro-Grant wing, running a reclusive campaign from his farm in Ohio, he eked out one of the narrowest popular vote victories in history, beating the Democrat Winfield Scott Hancock by only 10,000 votes. A forged letter nearly cost him the election (plus ca change), and only the energy of his Stalwart vice-presidential candidate Chester Arthur put him over the top, by methods that do not bear close examination in our somewhat more fastidious era. Nevertheless, he turned to his duties with increasing vigor, cracking down on Arthur's political patron, New York Senator Roscoe Conkling. In the tense climate of this political fight, his friends (including Conkling's -- and Grant's -- rival James Blaine) warned him that he risked the fate of his predecessor, Abraham Lincoln. Garfield responded bravely, "Assassination can be no more guarded against than death by lightning; and it is best not to worry about either." With Conkling beaten, Garfield set out for the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad station on July 2, 1881, ready for a long summer vacation. Instead, he got a bullet in the back.

*"I had no ill will towards the President. His death was a political necessity. I am a lawyer, a theologian, a politician. I am a Stalwart of the Stalwarts."
-- from a letter found on the person of Charles Guiteau*

The assassin was Charles Julius Guiteau, an eerie doppelganger in many ways of the President. Both were Midwesterners and youngest children, raised by single parents in poverty. Both were deeply religious -- Garfield thought about entering seminary, while Guiteau preached the occasional apocalyptic sermon for paying crowds -- and fervent Republicans. But where Garfield worked hard and made his fortune, Guiteau frittered away his talents writing increasingly insane tracts on spirit lore, wild religious theories, and borderline conspiracy theory. (Ahem.) Divorced from his wife, unable to find steady work as a lawyer after narrowly escaping trial for fraud, Guiteau drifted into the typical career path for idle, fraudulent lawyers in that era -- politics. By hanging around Republican headquarters in New York, Guiteau managed to convince himself that he had single-handedly elected Garfield, and he expected to receive a plum foreign posting in return. Instead, Guiteau got thrown out of a dizzying succession of government offices. To Guiteau, this ingratitude revealed the President as a traitor. But if Garfield was removed, Guiteau realized, Chester Arthur, his fellow Stalwart, would become President. In a moment of "inspiration" on May 18, 1881, Guiteau realized that God had called him to kill President Garfield.

He spent the next six weeks buying a gun (which he chose in part because it would look good in a museum later), writing his manifesto, stalking the President to church (where he decided not to kill him at prayer) and through Lafayette Park (where it was too hot to shoot), and camping out to watch the White House. Finally, hearing of Garfield's plan to leave the city for the summer, Guiteau screwed his courage to the sticking place. He followed the President to the railroad station, and fired two shots before fleeing. He was immediately arrested and taken to jail, which he had scouted earlier to see what kind of accommodations he could expect. The bullet lodged itself behind the President's pancreas, where it eluded several doctors' best efforts to probe the wound. Their best efforts were, in fact, fatal -- their unwashed fingers and instruments gave the President (and at least one attending doctor) blood poisoning. Unable to digest food, President Garfield slowly starved to death in near-constant agony for 80 days before he died in a New Jersey shore resort on September 19.

"If only they knew, they wouldn't want me there."

-- attributed to Robert Todd Lincoln

The gripping book *Dark Horse* by Kenneth D. Ackerman tells the story well, including (but not at all emphasizing) the ghoulish coincidence of Robert Todd Lincoln. Eldest son of Abraham Lincoln, he was at his father's bedside when the Great Emancipator died of an assassin's bullet. As a sop to the moderate Stalwarts, Garfield had made Robert Todd Lincoln his Secretary of War -- and Lincoln entered the railroad station just as Garfield was shot. (Just a week earlier, at the President's invitation, Robert had told the Cabinet about his father's prophetic dream of his own death.) In 1901, he was attending the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo, New York at the invitation of President William McKinley -- gunned down by Leon Czolgosz on the day Lincoln arrived. He refused all future Presidential invitations thereafter, but was lured back to Washington for the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial in 1922. He stood on the dais with Warren G. Harding -- who died in office in August the next year, in circumstances some attributed to poison. But not, at least, with Robert Todd Lincoln looking on.

"Contrary to events following the Lincoln assassination, no theories of possible conspiracy surfaced in the wake of Garfield's slaying."

-- Report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations

According to the astrologer Mark Lerner, Robert Todd Lincoln may have been a zodiacal conduit of Uranian energies between the killings -- among other things, Robert's birth and all three assassination dates show a Pythagorean Triangle, an arrangement of three planets in a triangle of 150-120-90 degrees. Although the precise planets and signs vary, Sagittarius (the Archer -- an interesting emblem for assassination) appears in all four Triangles. Which makes it kind of interesting that Garfield's monument holds the only sculpted zodiac on any public statue in Washington, D.C. The Garfield monument drips with not just astrological, but Masonic symbolism, as Garfield was (as it happens) a high-ranking Scottish Rite Mason of the Royal Arch Degree. And, while we're on a brief [sacred geometrical](#) tangent, one should note that the Baltimore & Potomac railroad station was on the longer leg of what would become the (Pythagorean) Federal Triangle. This points up the notion of President Garfield as sacred sacrifice that we've noted [before](#) in connection with America's hidden kings. And on that branch, Garfield's death by starvation, lasting 80 days, echoes the 80-day Aztec fast that began every year in Ochpaniztli, the harvest "month of sweeping." (The month was sacred to Xilonen, the Aztec version of Ceres, one of the planets in Garfield's Pythagorean Triangle.) He died, of course, on the New Jersey shore on the 19th day of Ochpaniztli, the day One Reed, the day of the Morning Star, a good day to travel over water.

"I wonder what I will see when I get to the Lordy,

I expect to see most glorious things,

Beyond all earthly conception"

-- from the last verse of the last words of Charles Guiteau

So much for Garfield's end -- what about Guiteau, his shadow? Ackerman quotes Guiteau's rambling insistence that he acted under "inspiration . . . where a man's mind is taken possession of by a superior power, and he acts outside of his own nature -- outside of himself." This "Divine pressure on me to remove the president was so enormous that it destroyed my free agency," he said, but he "never had the slightest doubt as to the divinity of the inspiration." Elsewhere, Guiteau is quoted as urging his interlocutors to "get acquainted with the science of spiritology . . . you will get much sense from that." The notion of Guiteau as possessed, as the host for some toxic spirit, may explain why Lucretia Garfield, the First Lady, contracted a mysterious high fever on April 25, 1881, the night she met Guiteau at a White House reception. She had only barely recovered before Garfield was having prophetic dreams of his death, and summoning Robert Todd Lincoln to interpret them. Where might Guiteau have contacted (or contracted) such spiritual parasites? Guiteau had joined John Humphrey Noyes' Oneida commune in 1860, and claimed to be "unable to get away from that influence" even after leaving the cult. He certainly continued to follow some of the Oneida beliefs, lecturing on the Second Coming, which he and Noyes agreed had already happened, in the year 70 A.D.

"Garfield, Arthur, Harrison, and Hayes, time of my father's time, blood of his blood, life of his life . . . were the lost Americans: their gravely vacant and bewhiskered faces mixed, melted, swam together in the sea depths of a past intangible, immeasurable, and unknowable as the buried city of Persepolis. And they were lost. For who was Garfield,

martyred man, and who had seen him in the streets of life? Who could believe that his footfalls ever sounded on a lonely pavement?"

-- Thomas Wolfe, "Four Lost Men" (1934)

Mark that point -- the Second Coming has already happened. History is over. This is an echo, a temblor perhaps, of a [reality quake](#) or of a secret war between two histories. 1881 becomes the hinge year; the [Emperor Norton](#), the Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau, and Billy the Kid die, leaving larger thrones vacant than a mere Presidency. Everyone feels it, somehow: 1881 is the end of the world according to some branches of the Jehovah's Witnesses, one reading of the Great Pyramid, and a popular prophecy attributed to the 16th-century English seeress Mother Shipton: "The world to an end shall come; In eighteen hundred and eighty one." President Garfield's Freemasons work feverishly to strengthen their shadow world, their [Empire that Never Ended](#) even though history has. They resume work on the Washington Monument on August 7, 1880, the day after Garfield meets the Stalwarts in a mysterious closed-door conference in New York City, and then erect Cleopatra's Needle in Central Park on February 22, 1881, seven months before Garfield's death.

But the Divinity that "inspired" Guiteau strikes back -- Guiteau hears his call, experiences his vastation, on the feast day of Pan, god of irrational fear. A comet appears on Midsummer's Day of 1881, a blazon traditionally heralding the "death of princes." Black birdlike shadows appear on the Moon on the night of Garfield's assassination, on America's true birthday, July 2, when it is most vulnerable. The egregores are gathering, waiting to shatter America's Masonic grid and drain the world's history dry. But Guiteau is a weak reed; the Masons trick him into a Hamlet Working when he fails to kill the king at prayer. Now they can spin Hamlet's Mill around the Pole Star obelisks, and restart History. Garfield (and the Presidents around him) will dim, and fade, and flicker, and melt -- but they will not disappear. The center will hold.

Plus, the Masons have an ace in the hole -- Robert Todd Lincoln, the personification of Uranian revolution. He warns Garfield, prepares him for the new role he must play. As a farmer, Garfield knows the sacred rhythms of the Corn King. He suffers his Dolorous Blow on the Triangle, energizing Washington's Masonic grid. He suffers for eighty days, the full fast of Xilonen, and dies by water on the day of Quetzalcoatl, One Reed, a propitious day for journeys. On the day after his burial, a Capetown observer saw "something like a comet" moving toward the Moon, something that did not appear the next day. But neither did the black shadows. Instead, [spectral armies](#) of helmeted "angels" marched across the aurora-suffused skies above Virginia and Maryland in September and October of 1881, including, by several reports, the gigantic figure of Garfield himself. There was a great war in heaven, and James A. Garfield saved the earth. Hail to the Chief.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Infinite Diversity in Finite Combinations

In an interview I read many years ago (which, I regret, I am utterly unable to find existence of, so it might just be a fevered hallucination caused by a glitch in the Matrix), fan-favorite writer, novelist, and creator Neil Gaiman once commented that he grew disillusioned with mainstream comics at an early age, because he realized that (for example) Aunt May probably wasn't going to die; this predictability ruined enough aspects of storytelling for him.

In a comic I read many days ago, Aunt May failed to die. She was rescued after many months of being held captive in a state of suspended animation by a madman (whose identity I won't spoil, except to say that it was the Green Goblin).

Now, one of the most interesting things about this story was that Aunt May had been held captive for many months previously; in fact, it was almost a decade ago exactly that this happened to the old gal. What's even more striking is that she had been held captive **BY THE SAME MADMAN.**

Marvel Comics, owners of powerful properties such as Aunt May and her sidekick Spider-Man, prides itself on not rebooting its universe every decade or so. So, presumably, both these stories did happen . . . probably, knowing how comic time compresses, within a year or two of each other. Really, after a while, if I was Spider-Man I would probably consider kidnapping Aunt May myself, just to try to shake things up a bit for the Green Goblin.

Now, here's the interesting thing. (And, yes, I know it's taken one-quarter of the column to get to the interesting thing. Gimmie a break; I've been sleep-deprived avoiding another freelance deadline by digging up decade-old comic books.) The two stories were, for the most part, completely different. (I started to detail *why* they were different, only to notice I was typing sentences that began, "In an effort to explain what happened the last time Aunt May died . . ." and realizing that no good could come of it. Suffice it to say, may you never need to explain to your children anything relating to the phrase "clone saga.")

And this got me to thinking: How many stories -- in recurring fiction, television shows, movies, comics, and, yes, gaming -- revolve around basically the same key plot element? Even a relatively small franchise, such as the Original Series *Star Trek* movies, found itself double-dipping when (to paraphrase Harlan Ellison) the crew of the *Enterprise* finds God, only to learn that God is A) a child, B) insane, or C) an insane child. (That's *Star Trek: The Motionless Picture* and *Star Trek V: We Shall Not Speak of This Again*, for those of you playing at home.) And, more amazingly, it's a plot that had been used on a healthy handful of episodes of the original series as well.

However, the amazing bit to me is that the stories all stand on their own, despite their superficial similarities; *Star Trek I* and *Star Trek V* are both deeply mediocre movies all by themselves. Expanding outward in our *Trek* lore a bit, I seem to recall that there are at least a half-dozen episodes or movies of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* where the destruction of the *Enterprise* (as in, you see it or a ship like it go "Boom!" in airless space) is a major plot point. But each of those stories stands alone on their own.

I think the trick, at least for me, is how the element and focus of the story varies with each iteration; understanding and embracing this is the key to finding new plots and ideas in gaming. For example, let's take a "recover the orb of power to keep the world from being destroyed" bit. I think it would be possible to run some variation of this plot every third adventure (at least), and still keep it fresh by introducing other elements and mixing them up:

- **Adventure #1:** "Recover the orb and save the world" -- Themes here are how grossly outclassed the fledgling heroes are to the task, and the hilarity that ensues when thrown head-first into the deep end.
- **Adventure #4:** "Recover the orb and save the world" -- Here it turns out the orb is being held by someone who things he's doing the right thing, and the heroes need to convince him of the greater good served by not letting the world get destroyed. (As the Tick said, "Earth?! That's where I keep all my *stuff!*")
- **Adventure #7:** "Recover the orb and save the world" -- This time the heroes are tricked, and recovering the orb turns out to be a [bad thing](#). Here the heroes either need to stop themselves in time or undo their damage.
- **Adventure #11:** "Recover the orb and save the world" -- It turns out the orb is sentient and doesn't *want* to be saved, and needs to be convinced. [What does it want?](#)

- **Adventure #15:** "Recover the orb and save the world" -- Here it turns out the orb is itself another world (or a gateway to another world), and to save the day the heroes need to recover the orb that represents *our* world from within this second world.

Obviously in each of the stories above "orb" and "save the world" are both tweaked themselves to provide some diversity.

Anyway, the point is that there are no new ideas, but the way they're expressed can provide infinite diversity themselves. Combine them with other finite ideas and you've got an even greater variation. In other words, don't worry that you're running the 80th dungeon crawl for your fantasy heroes. They're fantasy heroes; roaming dungeons is what they *do*.

If you let yourself be creative and accept that some themes are just going to repeat, you'll be much better off. I note that the five plot ideas above are just the first five ideas that popped in my head; I could probably come up with a dozen more. And, if anyone from Marvel is reading, I could also come up with a wicked "Aunt May is held captive for months by the Green Goblin" story myself . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

Lighting the Way

for *GURPS*

by S. E. Mortimer

This article examines the development of various sources of lighting throughout history and attempts to reconcile them with the way *GURPS* describes some of these, along with how the rules handle the effects of darkness. This work uses references to *GURPS Fourth Edition*, but everything discussed here should also be compatible with *Third Edition*.

Introduction

Until very recent times, the only means available to create artificial light was to burn something. Open fires not only created light but they were used for warmth, protection, and cooking. The first portable fire was likely to be the burning brand. Hold a branch in the fire and wait till it caught alight, then take it out and carry it with you to light your path. It would have soon been discovered that resinous wood burned more effectively than other types of wood. Once other flammable materials were discovered such as oil, fat, pitch, etc, it wouldn't have taken long for them to have been used to increase the brightness and duration of the flame.

Darkness Modifiers

A light source modifies the darkness in a local area from total darkness (-10) to the modifier specified in the item description. For example, according to the *Basic Set*, p. 394, a torch modifies the darkness penalty to -3. This normally only applies to a radius of two yards around the light. Here are some sample darkness modifiers:

- 0 Well-lit room, Continual Light 3 (B249)
- 1 Bonfire
- 2 Large campfire, Fireplace, Continual Light 2 (B249)
- 3 Street lights, torch or flashlight (B394), Continual Light 1 (B249)
- 4 Full moon, Light spell (B249)
- 5 Crescent moon
- 6 Starlight plus faint moonlight
- 7 Starlight and no moon
- 8 Lightly overcast starlight and no moon
- 9 Heavily overcast starlight and no moon

The intensity of light decreases with distance. Use the Size/Range Table on B550 to determine the darkness penalty at any given point. This is done by applying *half* the Range modifier (round up). For example, a target is 15 yards away from a torch (darkness penalty -3). The Range modifier for 15 yards is -5 and half of this is -3 (rounded up). Therefore, the target area has a darkness penalty of -6 (-3 -- 3).

Multiple light sources in the same location (candelabras, chandeliers, etc.) multiply the available light and reduce darkness penalties. Every time the number of light sources is doubled, the darkness penalty is reduced by 1. For example, a single candle might have a penalty of -5, two candles reduce it to -4, four candles reduce it to -3, and so on.

Types of Lighting

There are two main types of low-tech lighting. The most primitive lights have the fuel and flame as one. These include fire baskets, torches, and rushlights. More advanced lighting use a wick to keep the flame and fuel separated. Examples include candles, lamps, and lanterns. Electric lighting based on incandescent bulbs and fluorescent tubes are

developed in the 19th century and chemical lighting (chemiluminescence) appears in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Fire Baskets

A Fire basket consists of a cage of metal ribs and hoops to hold burning kindling or charcoal. If the bottom was not enclosed then it would be filled with stones to prevent hot embers falling out. They could be used for cooking by means of a grill or hotplate placed on top. Apart from the hearth, fire baskets had many uses. The Romans used fire baskets on ship masts to help avoid collisions at night -- similar to today's anchorlights. Primitive signal beacons and lighthouses consisted of wooden scaffolds with large fire baskets mounted atop.

A *brazier* is similar to a fire basket except that it consists of an enclosed bowl instead of an open cage. Because a fire basket is open, it sheds more light than an enclosed brazier, which is better used as a heat source for cooking or warming a room. Fire baskets allow airflow to fan the flames while braziers are intended to smother flame and allow embers to smoulder. There are multiple sizes of fire basket but only the smallest kind is portable. Portable fire baskets were usually hung from chains or mounted on a pole -- called a *cresset*.

A small, circular cresset (TL1) mounted on a pole would weigh around one pound and the kindling would weigh a further pound. It costs \$10, burn time is one hour, and the darkness penalty is *initially* -3, but it decreases by 1 every 20 mins. That is, the darkness penalty is -4 after 20 mins and -5 after 40 mins, unless the fuel is replenished with fresh kindling.

Torches

Simple Torch (TL0): The easiest method of making a torch is to simply light a piece of resinous wood. Most types of pine have high levels of turpentine and make good torches. Other types of suitable wood include boxwood and birch. Some Native American Indians used rolled tubes of birch bark bound with cord. These sorts of torches burn very erratically, popping and spitting, and sometimes extinguishing before they finish burning. A simple torch (TL0) weighs 1 lb, costs \$1, has a darkness penalty of -4, and can burn for up to half an hour. During this time it can spontaneously extinguish. Roll every 5 mins. On a roll of 1 it goes out and needs to be relit.

Splinter Torch (TL1): In order to ensure that wood burns effectively, it needs to be held with the burning end down. This was difficult to do by hand so it was often held in a metal clamp on a pole called a "splint holder." Using a splint holder enabled the entire length of the wood to be burned and it rarely spontaneously extinguished. A splinter torch consists of the splint of wood, a metal clamp, and a handle. The metal clamp and handle costs \$10 and weighs 1 lb. A splinter of an appropriate size weighs 0.5 lb so a charged splinter torch weighs 1.5 lbs. It has a burn time of half an hour and a darkness penalty of -4.

Common Torch (TL0): Similar to a simple torch except that the end of the wood is treated with a flammable material (see *Fuels*, below). The wood could be dipped in a viscous fuel such as pitch, or wrapped in a cloth that had been soaked in a more liquid fuel such as oil or grease. A common torch weighs 1 lb, has a darkness modifier of -3, burns for 1 hour, and costs \$3. This is the torch listed on p.B288.

Sapling Torch (TL0): Made by cutting down saplings and beating the ends into a fibrous state. The fibers were then impregnated with a flammable material (see *Fuels*, below). Multiple saplings were bundled together to make a torch. One was left long enough to act as a handle. Treat this as a Common Torch (above).

Rope Torch (TL0): Made by dipping a rope, usually made of flax or hemp, into a flammable material (see *Fuels*, below). Multiple segments of rope were bound together and tied to a handle with cord. Treat this as a Common Torch (above).

Another item commonly called a torch consists of a cone of metal or a cup on a handle with a wick and an oil reservoir. This is more accurately classed as a *lamp* (see below).

Rushlights

First used by the ancient Egyptians, the rushlight is made from stripped and treated rushes. The "soft" or "candle" rush (*Juncus effusus*) has a round, green, erect stem up to four feet tall, filled with a soft, white pith. It has no leaves but there are small flowers several inches below the plant's pointed tip. It grows in wet temperate lowlands such as lake shores, marches, and boglands. To make rushlights, the tallest and strongest rushes were collected in summer or early autumn and soaked in water before peeling. Most of the rind was removed, leaving a single rib to hold the pith intact. They were deposited outside to collect dew for several nights and then dried in the sun. Once dried, the rushes were dipped in a "grisset" full of a hot mixture of oils and fats. (see *Fuels*, below).

Rushlights were lit at the top, like a candle (see below). The quality and duration of light was determined by the care at which the rush was prepared and the contents of the dipping mixture. A typical rush was between two and three feet in length. A rush holder, or *rushnip*, was the vessel that held the treated rushes while they burnt. The jaws ("nip") of the rushnip held the rushlight while it burnt. The rate of burning could be controlled by adjusting the angle of the rush. If vertical, it burned slowly and dimly. If horizontal, it burned more brightly and quickly. Many rushnips were made with an integrated candlestick so a person could use the same device for holding both rushlights and candles. Rushes make good nightlights because they disintegrate when they burn down, making them unlikely to start a fire. A burning rushlight is smokey and pungent. A typical rushlight will burn for about half an hour with a darkness penalty of -5 if held horizontal. If held vertically, the duration can be lengthened to over an hour but the darkness penalty is -6. It takes six pounds of common grease to dip a pound of rushes but even after dipping, the weight of each is negligible, since there are over 1,500 prepared and dipped rushes in a one-pound bundle. A pound of grease costs \$1. A pound of undipped rushes costs \$5, and a pound of prepared and dipped rushes costs \$30. If there are over 1,500 dipped rushes in a pound then each rushlight costs less than 2 cents ea.

Candles

The word comes from the latin *candere* ("to shine"). Candles burn in manner similar to lamps. When the candle wick is lit, the heat from the flame melts the tallow or wax, forming a tiny but constantly replenishing reservoir of fuel at the base of the wick. This fuel is carried up to the flame by capillary action. It is thought that candles were first used by the early dynasties of the Egyptian pharaohs. The earliest candles consisted of wicks made from woven papyrus fibers coated in pitch or beeswax. By the time of the Etruscans and Greeks, candles were common and tallow began to be used. In medieval Europe, a large, wealthy household could consume over a hundred pounds of wax and tallow in a single night. Lighting formed a considerable portion of the household budget and regulations were imposed to stipulate which tasks could be performed with wax candles, which with tallow, and which were not permitted candles at all. Surviving documents suggest that there were multiple sizes of candle. For example a *chandoile* was a small candle made from tallow while a *cierge* was a large candle made from wax. A *taper* is a long thin candle, while a *mortar* was a thick candle -- it didn't give much light, but it burned very slowly, making a handy night light (-6 darkness modifier).

Tallow (TL1): Tallow is animal fat that has been boiled and strained. Hard, solid fat, like suet, is better than slimy, greasy fat, like lard. Lard can be used

Open Flames and Drafts

Small, open flames, such as rushlights, candles and lamps, are easily blown out by drafts and so are best used indoors. But even indoors a flame can easily extinguish -- especially if it is moving. **Low-Tech** has a rule to handle this. Anyone carrying one of these light sources while moving faster than Move 2 (a brisk walk) must make a DX+4 roll every turn, at -2 per point of Move above 2. On a failure, the flame blows out at the end of the turn. (p. LT31)

Bayberry Wax

Sometimes called *bayberry tallow* or *myrtle wax*, it is obtained by boiling bayberries in water and scraping the fatty layer from the surface. This waxy substance is grey-green in colour and a little more brittle than beeswax. It burns with a clear white, almost smokeless flame and has a pleasant odor. Bayberry wax was laborious to produce -- about 40 lbs of bayberries yielded only 1 lb of wax.

but it must be hardened with something like alum or saltpetre and is more smokey and smelly than regular tallow. Tallow burns with a pungent, smokey flame but proper trimming ("snuffing") of the wick can reduce this significantly. It goes soft even in mild climates so a little beeswax (5-10%) was often added to render it firmer, cleaner, and less messy. A pound of tallow candles costs \$5, provides a darkness penalty of -5 and a burn time of 12 hours. These are the candles listed on p.B288.

Beeswax (TL1): This is made by bees in warm weather, and it produces very fine candles. It burns with a bright flame, does not smoke or sputter, and emits a fragrant odor. Beeswax burns longer than other types of candle and, if there is no draft, it will not drip. Beeswax candles were expensive and in high demand. Only aristocrats and churches could afford to burn them. Unscrupulous chandlers sometimes adulterated beeswax with tallow, although this practice was illegal. A pound of pure beeswax candles costs \$25, provides a darkness penalty of -4 and a burn time of 18 hours.

Other waxes: In Colonial America the grey-green berries of the bayberry bush were boiled to produce a wax that was sweet-smelling and burnt clean (see textbox, right). A pound of bayberry candles burn as brightly as beeswax (-4 darkness penalty) but have a shorter duration (14 hours). They cost \$18. Another fuel was a wax called *spermaceti* that was made by crystallising sperm whale oil. Like beeswax, it burnt odorless and cleanly. It was also harder than beeswax and tallow, and didn't soften or bend in hot climates. A pound of spermaceti candles burn as brightly as beeswax (-4 darkness penalty), have a duration of 16 hours, and cost \$20. In the 19th century, paraffin wax was made from distilled petroleum and was cheaper to produce than any other previously used wax. It also didn't spoil on the shelf like animal products. Paraffin has a very low melting point but mixing it with stearic acid (chemically reduced animal fat) made it suitable for candles. Unlike tallow, paraffin wax is not smokey or pungent when burnt, but has a shorter burn time. A pound of paraffin candles has a darkness penalty of -4, a burn time of 8 hours, and costs \$3.

A person who made candles was called a *chandler*. The most common type of candle was produced by dipping a wick into hot wax or tallow. It was allowed to cool, then dipped again and again until it reached the required thickness. The dipped candles were then hung up to whiten and harden. They could be passed through a cylinder or ring to shape them. Candles could also be cast in a mould. Tapers were produced by pouring molten wax down the wick. In towns, chandlers usually set up shop near to an abbatoir, from whence they purchased the necessary animal fat for rendering into tallow.

Candle Sticks: There are two main types of candlestick: the *pricket* and the *socket* type. Both were probably invented about the same time. The Romans are known to have used both kinds. Socket candlesticks had a cup to receive a candle of an appropriate diameter. Most sockets had a slot or hole to enable the easy removal of the candle stub. The pricket candlestick is a simple spike on which the candle is impaled. It was more versatile since it could hold candles of any diameter. Despite this, socket candlesticks became more common. The most common candlesticks were made from wood or clay, but more elaborate versions were made from marble or metal.

Lamps (TL1)

From the Greek, *lampas*, meaning "torch." All lamps rely on the same principal. The capillary action of the wick draws the liquid fuel along it to the end where the flame burns. As long as there is fuel in the reservoir, the flame

Grave Wax

"Grave wax" or "mortuary fat" is more accurately called *adipocere*. It is a crumbly white, waxy substance that accumulates on those parts of a corpse that contain fat -- mainly the cheeks, breasts, abdomen, and buttocks. It is the product of a chemical reaction in which fats react with water and hydrogen in the presence of bacterial enzymes. Adipocere is resistant to bacteria and can protect a corpse, slowing decomposition. It starts to form within a month after death and has been recorded on bodies that have been exhumed after several centuries. If a body is submerged in water, adipocere is most likely to form, but if unburied or exposed to insects it is unlikely to form.

In a roleplaying scenario a practitioner of dark magic might require candles made from grave wax. It would make a gruesome task if the PCs were sent on an errand to collect some. Alternatively, the magic user might keep a collection of corpses carefully stored in water so as to have a ready supply of this ingredient.

Bird Lamps

Some animals contain a great deal of fat. In the Shetlands and

continues to burn. The earliest extant lamps were hollowed out from soft stone such as soapstone, steatite, or limestone, and date back to paleolithic times. Limestone is a particularly good material for lamp bowls because it is a poor heat conductor. A lamp bowl made from limestone may be held in the hand without burning the user. Clay lamps were common in the Bronze Age and were used by many cultures. Later they were made of metal, glass, and porcelain. The simplest lamp consists of an open bowl filled with oil or fat (see *Fuels*, below) and a wick draped over the rim. Making a bowl with some sort of "spout" helps to keep the wick in place. Enclosing the bowl with a lid prevents the oil from spilling but a hole is needed in the lid for airflow. Adding a handle makes the lamp easier to carry. The addition of glazing prevented the oil from seeping into the earthenware. Putting a little water in the bottom of the lamp prevents it from overheating once the fuel runs out. In a simple lamp the wick lies at an angle. Because of this, only the upper side of the wick is burnt and unused oil drips off the bottom. A saucer is usually used to recover this for reuse. A vertical wick burns oil more efficiently but requires some sort of mechanism to hold it in place.

A crude (albeit smokey and smelly) lamp could be nothing more elaborate than a grease-filled skillet with a twisted rag stuck in it. The darkness penalty would be -5 and its burn time might be half an hour. A pint of oil weighs about 1 lb and costs \$2 (B288). A typical oil lamp comes in two sizes. A small one holds 0.5 oz of oil and burns for around 3 hours, so a pint of oil provides 32 refills (96 hours). Its darkness penalty is -5 and it weighs 0.5 lb. Cost is \$5. A large lamp holds one pint of oil and burns for around 12 hours with a darkness penalty of -4. It costs \$12 and weighs 2 lbs when full (1 lb when empty). A vertical wick increases duration of the lamp by 10% since less of the oil is wasted. Increase the cost of the lamp by 50%.

Oil lamp technology didn't change much until the 18th century. Several developments made small improvements in the efficiency of lamps. First, flat wicks were found to be more effective than round wicks. Second, a glass "chimney" was developed to protect the flame and prevent it from flickering while providing an updraft to help it burn more efficiently. The combination of flat wick and glass chimney increased brightness a little (not enough to affect darkness penalty) and improved the burn time by about 10%. In 1783-4 Swiss chemist Francois-Pierre Argand, developed a revolutionary wick design. Called the "Argand burner," it consisted of a hollow adjustable wick around a central draft tube. This greatly improved the airflow and thus increased the brightness of the flame while improving fuel efficiency. There was less smoke because the higher combustion temperature resulted in less unburnt particles. The Argand burner dramatically increased the brightness of an oil lamp but also increased the rate of fuel consumption.

Lanterns (TL2)

In its simplest form, a lantern is basically a lamp (or candle) with some sort of shield. This shield encloses the flame, protecting it from the elements and ensuring that it burns more evenly and efficiently. A lantern is more suitable for outdoor use than a lamp because it is unlikely to blow out. Indoors it is a safer option because the flame is not exposed. Because a lantern flame is enclosed, some sort of window is needed to emit light. Initially these windows were uncovered -- early Chinese and Japanese lanterns were of this type. Large ones were made of stone and used in gardens. Smaller ones were made of metal and

Hebrides one simple method of making a lamp was to kill a sea bird such as a Stormy Petrel or Great Awk and shove a wick, made of dried moss, down its gullet, and light it.

Acetylene Lamp (TL6)

Sometimes called a "carbide lamp" because it is fuelled by adding water to calcium carbide (CaC_2) pellets. The resulting chemical reaction generates acetylene gas which is burned as fuel. Introduced at the beginning of the 20th century, these lamps usually had two chambers. The top chamber was filled with water and small carbide pellets were added to the bottom one. Water dripped onto the pellets and acetylene gas was generated. This gas flowed to a nozzle which was lit to produce a brilliant yellow-white flame. Acetylene lamps were popular portable light sources used for many applications from bicycle and automobile headlights to the helmet lights worn by miners and cavers. A small, portable acetylene lamp weighs 0.5 lb with a burn time of around 12 hours. Darkness penalty is -3. Cost is \$25.

Bulls-eye Lantern (TL3)

This consists of a simple cylindrical lantern, usually made from sheet metal, with a fluted chimney in the top. Versions were developed to hold either candles or oil lamps, depending on the intended application. Some came with foldable wire handles and belt clips. A "bulls-eye" lens (see

hung outside to light doorways and shrines. A better solution was to use a translucent material such as parchment, animal skin, or paper to completely enclose the flame while still permitting light to escape. Mica, called "talc" by some period sources, was common because it was almost transparent and a poor heat conductor. But it was as fragile as glass, and glass was preferable, albeit more expensive, because it let more light through and was easier to shape. Horn was considered to be excellent for making lanterns; in fact, the word "lantern" is thought to come from the word *lanthorn*, which refers to animal horn suitable for lighting. When prepared properly, horn was virtually transparent and could be made into sheets as thin as paper but more supple and nearly unbreakable. Horn was susceptible to burning, though, and will blacken if placed too close to a flame. As horn ages, it becomes yellow and opaque, and less suitable for lanterns.

Reflectors and Lenses, below) was fitted to a round window in front to focus light into a beam. This lantern was sometimes called a "flash light" because of a metal shield inside the housing that could be moved in front of the window to obscure the light when necessary.

In many cities during the middle ages it was illegal to walk the streets after dark without a lantern; it was reasoned that if you were carrying a lantern, you were less likely to be up to no good. The first stationary lighting would have been seen in 16th century cities in Europe, when it became common practice to sit a lantern on first floor windowsills during winter. In India and the Middle East, street lighting was used much earlier; the earliest evidence comes from Mohenjo-Daro in India, dating to more than 5,000 years ago. In Europe it wasn't until the 17th century that public street lighting began to appear in the middle of the streets. At first they were simple pole-mounted lanterns containing oil lamps but various designs were tested in an effort to produce more light. In 1763, the *réverbères* made their appearance in Paris. These lanterns contained an oil lamp with several wicks. A parabolic reflector (see *Reflectors and Lenses*, below) above the flame protected it from the weather and directed the light downwards, while a less concave reflector closer to the flame, directed the light outwards. In time oil lamps gave way to gas lights.

Eventually, the glass shield around the flame was modified into a rounded chimney shape to help control the airflow. Glass was very fragile and so was not suitable for all applications. The advantage of putting a shutter or shield over the window was to enable the light to be "turned off" at will. When closed, no light could escape. There are many, many different types of lanterns. A simple medieval design consisted of a cylindrical metallic housing with a round or conical top and a vent hole. Some had a square window in front, but others multiple windows to shed light in all directions. They could have a ring attached to the top for hanging or a handle on the back for carrying (like a tankard). The window was usually covered with mica or horn and some holes were pierced in the housing for ventilation. They were mainly designed for candles but some held oil lamps. A variation of this design was the "bulls-eye lantern" (see textbox, right). A sturdy lantern could be made from a shaped sheet of metal that had been pierced with many holes to allow light to escape and for ventilation. Later models used wire mesh.

A lantern enables a light source to be used outdoors without blowing out. All lanterns cost \$20 and, with the exception of clear glass, increase the darkness penalty of a light source by -1. Lanterns burn more efficiently than an unshielded flame because of controlled airflow. A standard lantern (TL2) increases the burn time of a light source by 5%. More advanced designs including the previously mentioned glass chimney increases burn time by 10% but is double the cost of a standard lantern.

Wicks

Early wicks were made from rush-type plants. One variant was made from peeled scarpas and another was made from two rolled pieces of papyrus impregnated with sulphur. Other materials such as dried moss, grass, hemp, leaves, and bark strips (fluffy cedar bark is good) were also used. Wicks made from flax were very common and are even mentioned in the Bible (*Isaiah* xlii. 3). Old rags could be ripped up and twisted into wicks. Coarse cotton twine wicks became common in the 15th century. They burned brighter and without sputtering. Wicks need to be trimmed ("snuffed") regularly, otherwise the flame burns smokier and less efficiently as the wick lengthens. Thicker wicks put out more light but use much more fuel. It is possible to decrease the darkness penalty by 1 by increasing the thickness of the wick, but the fuel is consumed four times more quickly.

In the 18th century the Frenchman, Cambaceres, discovered that plaited cotton was more effective than twisted cotton. A wick made in this manner would curl over into the outer mantel of the flame where it was consumed -- effectively

trimming itself and producing less smoke. Later, flat wicks were found to be better than round ones. By 1890 the *incandecent mantle* had begun to replace wicks in some lamps. A mantle was basically a gauze that was impregnated with certain rare earth oxides. When first ignited by a gas flame, the gauze fabric burns away leaving the residual brittle oxides glowing brightly in the heat. Unlike a wick, the oxide mantle is not consumed and can be reused many times. Because the flame is optimised to only produce heat and not light, much less fuel is required.

Reflectors and Lenses

Reflector Plate (TL1): A highly polished piece of metal (brass and tin were commonly used) can increase the efficiency of a light source by deflecting light that would otherwise be wasted. Another benefit is that the reflector enables the user to retain his night vision since there is no light shining back in his eyes. A reflector plate decreases the darkness penalty of a light source by 1, but only in a semi-circle in front of the light; there is no illumination behind the reflector. Adding a reflector plate to a lamp or candlestick increases its cost by 20%.

Parabolic Reflector (TL2): This is more efficient than a simple reflector plate. Theoretically, if the light is placed in the focal point of the parabola, the rays of light are all reflected parallel to one another, increasing the amount of available light and focusing it into a beam. Moving the source toward the reflector will spread the light, while moving the source away from the reflector will cause the light rays to converge. A parabolic reflector decreases the darkness penalty of a light source by 1, and increases the range from 2 to 5 yards, but only in a direct line in front of the source. Many types of flashlight (see below) utilise a parabolic reflector. Adding a parabolic reflector to a light source increases its cost by 50%

Transmissive lens (TL3): Used in "bulls-eye" lanterns (see textbox, above) and some modern flashlights. A transmissive lens (e.g. a common magnifying glass) uses refraction to achieve a similar result as a parabolic reflector. Instead of light being reflected off a surface, light is bent at the interface between air and glass. A similar effect can be achieved by filling a spherical glass flask with water (sealed and mounted upside down). Lenses are not as efficient as reflectors but are generally more compact. A lens decreases the darkness penalty of a light source by 1 and increases the range from 2 yards to 4 yards, but only in a direct line in front of the source. Adding a lens increases the cost of a light source by 50%. It is possible to add both a lens and a reflector but the benefits are not cumulative. Adding a lens to a parabolic reflector increases the range from 5 yards to 6 yards.

Fuels

Pitch/Asphalt/Bitumen (TL0): Natural deposits of petroleum derivatives (e.g. tar pits) make good sources of fuel and require little work. Simply dip a prepared torch into the heated mixture and wait for it to soak in. When cool it is thick and viscous so it stays on the end of the torch. Often it contains sulphur contaminants, however, and so is very pungent when burnt. It pops and spits noisily.

Resin (TL0): Pine resin, or "pine pitch" is easy to collect because it oozes and solidifies on the outside of injured pine trees. It may also be collected by driving a hollow tube at an angle into the cambium layer of the tree and collecting the resin as it drips out the end of the tube. In hotter climates, resin from the turpentine tree may be used instead. A resin torch is made by dipping the end of a branch into hot resin and then allowing it to cool before repeating

Tight Beams vs. Diffused Light

One might think that a bright, focused beam of light is best because there will still be useful light in the area outside the main beam. However, the contrast from the centre of the bright beam to the dark area just outside is high, so it appears much darker to the eye. This makes it very difficult to see objects outside the beam and can be dangerous when walking through rough terrain. For general use a more dispersed light source is best, providing a broad transition zone that lowers contrast and enables the eye to move comfortably between. Ideally a person would want two light sources. A tight beam for spotting distant objects and a dispersed light for general use.

Oil Flasks (p.B411)

A common staple of roleplaying games is the use of thrown oil flasks that break and spill burning liquid over the target. There are really very few fuels capable of "flashing" like this. There are several petroleum products including naphtha, kerosene, and gasoline, but some are more volatile than others. The previously mentioned *camphene* is especially volatile.

multiple times -- similar to candle dipping. The problem with resin is that it is very smokey and will drip. If burning pitch drips onto flesh, it will do 1 point of damage every 2 seconds until it is removed (it can even burn through thick leather). Resin torches are very dangerous and are more likely to be set into wall brackets for fixed lighting rather than carried around.

Naptha is the only fuel available before TL5. Fuels based on animal fat or vegetable oil usually extinguish when spilled.

Animal Fat (TL0): The Inuit sometimes make light by burning a chunk of animal fat. This is simple and quick but inefficient, smelly, and smokey. It is better to use fat in a lamp but not all fats are suitable for this. The necessary property of a good lamp fat is that it melts quickly at low temperatures so the wick can absorb it at a faster rate than the wick consumes itself. Examples of suitable animal fats include seal, horse, and cattle. Rendered fat works much more efficiently than raw fat and virtually any animal fat can be rendered into oil (see *Animal Oil*, below).

Animal Oil (TL1): Tallow is made from the rendered fat of animals -- usually mammals. It is rendered by melting and cooking followed by straining to remove contaminants. This is then heated and strained again before being "washed" in boiling water. Some tallow melted at lower temperatures than others. Tallow that melted at relatively high temperatures was used for making candles. Tallow with a low melting point was used to fuel lamps. *Ghee* (clarified butter) was a common lamp fuel in India and South Asia. Whale oil was always a common fuel in the cold, northern parts of the world, and became widespread during the "hey day" of the whaling industry. Oil from the Sperm whale could be crystallised into a waxy substance suitable for candles (see *Candles*, above).

Vegetable Oil (TL1): There is no evidence to suggest that vegetable oils were ever used for lighting in the Paleolithic era -- only animal fat. It is likely that vegetable oils began to be used in the Neolithic era. By the Bronze Age vegetable oils -- olive oil especially -- was widely used for lighting. Another commonly used vegetable oil came from the rape seed (called *colza* or more recently, *canola*). Many nuts have a high oil content and some, such as walnuts, are suitable for lamp fuel. Other examples include castor oil, linseed oil and til oil. It takes around six pounds of the unprocessed food to make one pound of oil, though the best grades of oil are often kept for cooking and only the poorer grades are used as fuel.

Waxes (TL1): Already discussed (see *Candles*, above).

Naptha (TL3): A petroleum derivative. It is thought that the Chinese were the first to discover the benefits of petroleum. Evidence of primitive oil wells have been discovered dating to the 4th century AD. They were dug using iron bits attached to long bamboo shafts. By the 10th century Arab nations were exporting distilled petroleum (called *naptha*) throughout the Islamic world. It is likely that the Greeks made use of naptha as a constituent of their infamous Greek Fire. Marco Polo described passing through the Persian region of Baku on the Caspian Sea where distilled petroleum oil was used for lighting. Initially seep oil was collected at Baku but wells began to be dug at the end of the 16th century.

Camphene (TL5): The first attempt at a substitute for whale oil. Often simply called "burning fluid," it was made from a mixture of turpentine (distilled from wood), alcohol (distilled from grains) and camphor oil. It was a volatile, dangerous fuel that tended to spontaneously ignite when heated and even explode.

Paraffin/Kerosene (TL5): In 1850, the Scotsman, James Young patented a process of coal distillation that produced a lubricant he called "paraffin," and Dr. Abraham Gesner, a Canadian geologist, later developed a process to liquify paraffin for use as a fuel. He called it "kerosene." It was far less expensive to produce than earlier fuels and is still being used today.

Flashlights (TL6)

Many attempts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were made to devise portable electric lamps. Difficulties stemmed from the fact that early batteries were heavy and carbon filament bulbs were inefficient. They were called "flashlights" because they did not produce a steady stream of light. The user had to flash the light on for a few seconds and then release the contact switch. It wasn't until more efficient batteries and coiled tungsten filament light bulbs (still used today) were developed that electric lights became truly portable. The name "flashlight" was retained, but by

World War I they were producing steady streams of light for minutes at a time. Over the next few decades, batteries and flashlights became more efficient. Flashlights vary greatly in size and function, but the suggestions of p. 288 of the **Basic Set** will be used for simplicity and consistency. A typical flashlight has a darkness modifier of -3 and emits a tight beam of light. It was meant for spot lighting rather than area lighting.

Early Flashlight (TL6): These models weigh 1 lb, have a burn time of around 5 hours, and a beam range of 5 yards. Cost \$10.

Modern Flashlight (TL7): Also weighs 1 lb but its burn time and beam range is doubled (10 hrs / 10 yards). Cost \$20. TL7 flashlights can also be more compact and can have additional features such as a waterproof housing and switch, coloured filters, prefocused bulbs, etc.

Miniature Flashlight (TL7): Has the same darkness penalty (-3) but only weighs 0.25 lbs and has a burn time of 1 hour. Its beam range is 5 yards. Cost \$10.

Handcranked Flashlight (TL7): Looks similar to a regular flashlight that fits snugly in the hand but a "dynamo" generator replaces the batteries and a springloaded trigger replaces the switch. The trigger is repeatedly depressed to charge the generator and produce light. It needs to be cranked every few seconds to produce continuous light and it is noisy. Weight is 0.5 lbs, darkness penalty is -3, and beam range is 5 yards. Cost \$15.

LED Flashlight (TL8): At TL8, white LEDs (light emitting diodes) begin to be used instead of incandescent filament bulbs. A reasonably-sized LED flashlight, with multiple LEDs and an appropriate reflector provides similar illumination to a regular flashlight (-3 darkness penalty) but uses much less power. A model weighing 0.25 lbs has a burn time of around 48 hours and a beam range of 5 yards. Cost \$30.

Induction Flashlight (TL8): A LED flashlight that uses Faraday's Principle of Induction instead of batteries. The light is shaken to charge a capacitor -- the movement causes a magnet to pass through a copper coil, generating electricity. It takes about 30 secs to charge the capacitor and the light lasts for about 5 mins. For continuous light, repeated shaking for 10-15 secs every 2-3 minutes is required. Weight is 0.5 lbs and beam range is 5 yards but it isn't as bright (darkness penalty -4). Cost \$30.

Chemical lighting (TL8). Glow Sticks (TL8): A cheap, portable source of light that needs no power source and generates no heat. The glow is caused by a reaction (called chemiluminescence) between two chemical solutions in a flexible plastic tube. Green is the most common colour. The two solutions are kept apart by a fragile glass cylinder. When the plastic casing is bent, the glass is broken and the two solutions mix together, generating light as they react. The reaction rate is controlled by the temperature. High temperatures result in a brighter glow but lower duration and vice versa in cold temperatures. At mild temperatures a 6" glowstick has an initial darkness penalty of -5 but it drops a further -1 for every 2 hours afterwards. Increasing the temperature (e.g. soaking in hot water) increases the modifier to -4 but only for 10 mins. Every 10 minute increment drops the penalty by -1. The weight of a glow stick is negligible and it costs around \$2.

Price List

Torches	TL	Weight	Cost	Mod.	Time	Notes
Simple Torch	0	1 lb	\$1	-4	30 mins	Goes out on a roll of 1
Splinter torch	1	1.5 lbs	\$10	-4	30 mins	Holds splinters of wood
Common Torch	1	1 lb	\$3	-3	1 hr	p.B288
Cresset	1	2 lbs	\$5	-3*	1 hr	Firebox on a pole

* Darkness penalty increases by -1 every 20 mins.

Candles	TL	Weight	Cost	Mod.	Time	Notes
Rushlight	1	neg.	\$0.02	-5	30 mins	
Rushnip	1	1 lb	\$10	N/A	N/A	Rushlight holder

Candles, paraffin	5	1 lb	\$3	-4	8 hrs	
Candles, tallow	1	1 lb	\$5	-5	12 hrs	p.B288
Candles, bayberry	1	1 lb	\$18	-4	14 hrs	
Candles, spermaceti	1	1 lb	\$20	-4	16 hrs	
Candles, beeswax	1	1 lb	\$25	-4	18 hrs	
Candlestick, iron	1	0.5 lb	\$10	N/A	N/A	Holds 1 candle
Candlestick, brass	1	0.5 lb	\$40	N/A	N/A	Holds 1 candle
Candlestick, silver	1	0.5 lb	\$250	N/A	N/A	Holds 1 candle

Lamps	TL	Weight	Cost	Mod.	Time	Notes
Oil lamp, small	0	0.5 lb	\$5	-5	3 hrs	
Oil lamp, large						
-- unmodified	0	2 lbs	\$12	-4	12 hrs	
-- vertical wick (vw)	1	2 lbs	\$18	-4	13 hrs	
-- vw & glass chimney	5	2 lbs	\$30	-4	15 hrs	
-- Argand & glass chimney	5	2 lbs	\$50	-3	8 hrs	
Acetylene lamp	6	0.5 lb	\$25	-3	12 hrs	

Notes

- Lamps and candles have an exposed flame and are not suitable for use outdoors. Exposed flames will constantly flicker and can blow out even in a slight draft.
- For outdoor use, lamps and candles need to be housed within a **lantern**.
- A standard lantern (TL2) increases burn time by 5% and costs \$20.
- A lantern with a glass chimney (TL5) increases burn time by 10% and costs double the price of a standard lantern.
- With the exception of clear glass, all lanterns increase darkness penalties by -1.

Flashlights	TL	Weight	Cost	Mod.	Time	Notes
Bulls-eye Lantern	3	2 lbs	\$30	-4*	5 yds	13 hrs
Early	6	1 lb	\$10	-3*	5 yds	5 hrs
Modern	7	1 lb	\$20	-3*	10 yds	10 hrs
Miniature	7	0.25 lbs	\$10	-3*	5 yds	1 hr
Handcranked	7	0.5 lbs	\$15	-3*	5 yds	N/A
LED	8	0.25 lbs	\$30	-3*	5 yds	24 hrs
Induction	8	0.5 lbs	\$30	-4*	5 yds	5 mins

* creates a beam of light out to the indicated range (spotlight). It does not light up an area.

Misc	TL	Weight	Cost	Mod.	Time	Notes
Glowstick	8	neg.	\$2	-5	2 hrs*	Break inner glass tube for light

* Darkness penalty increases by -1 every 2 hours.

The Will Against the World

A Background *In Nomine* Sorcerers

by Bevan Thomas

Sorcery is an intriguing and often overlooked element of *In Nomine*. In a world dominated by powerful angels and demons, sorcery gives certain humans a much-needed edge, allowing them to master powers out of reach of celestials, and even temporarily bind these powerful beings to their will. Sorcerers can make solid anti-heroic protagonists or enigmatic antagonists.

The original rules for sorcery can be found in *The Marches*, and updated rules are included in *The Corporeal Player's Guide*. This article lays out a possible history and central philosophy of sorcery, and analyzes various sorcerous archetypes and dark philosophies.

History of the Dark Art

Legends abound on who created sorcery. Many suggest that when Adam (or possibly Eve) ate from the Tree of Knowledge, that supreme act of egotism opened his mind to a power that had not existed before. Others have suggested that it was one of Adam's children, such as Seth or Cain, who first developed the Dark Art. One disturbing theory is that Lilith was the first sorcerer, and certainly the individualistic pride that most sorcerers possess suits the Demon Princess of Freedom's philosophy. Both Heaven and Hell officially deny this theory, and the idea of a Superior practicing sorcery is terrifying to many celestials.

No matter its origins, sorcery quickly spread over the world, for there will always be humans hungry for the power to satisfy their pride. It was practiced by Paleolithic tribal priests who wished to exert dominion over the spirits that they saw everywhere, it was practiced openly by the rulers of ancient kingdoms such as Egypt and Babylon, and it even found followers among the first practitioners of divine religions: the Zoroastrian magi and the Jewish mystics.

One of the most influential and powerful sorcerers was King Solomon the Wise who ruled Israel in the 10th century BC. Though dedicated to God, this famous Jewish king forced mighty ethereals and demons to do his bidding, and much of his city, particularly the Temple of Solomon, was built with the aid of demons, including Aram and Zeresh, two powerful servitors of the Game. So powerful was Solomon that few demons were willing to lift a hand against him, and even demon princes seemed disinclined to confront him directly. A dedicated scholar of the occult, Solomon codified many sorcerous practices and rituals, and his book *The Key of Solomon* is rumored to be the most complete grimoire ever written (though only fragments have been located over the last few millennia).

Even Solomon constantly struggled with the godless pride that sorcery fostered within him, however, and many other sorcerers found themselves dragged into damnation by their practices. Because of this, Heaven has always taken a hard stance on sorcery, with servitors of Dominic and Uriel particularly eager to hunt down practitioners of the Dark Art.

Despite the attempts of Heaven, sorcery still continued to thrive among those mortals willing to sacrifice all for power. One demon, an ambitious Balseraph of Factions named Leonard, rose to power during the degeneration of the Roman Empire, and was eventually awarded with the Word of Sorcery. Leonard developed various cabals dedicated to sorcery, power, and the satisfaction of baser desires, twisting pagan mystery cults into hellish orgies of blood and demonic exultation. As he preferred to appear as a black furred humanoid with the head of a billy-goat, Leonard would often be referred to simply as "The Black Man" or "The Horned Man."

The Dark Ages were a good time for sorcery. The fall of Rome destabilized the entire region, allowing sorcerers to gain power, and though many angels and their agents hunted practitioners of the Dark Art with zeal, the sorcerers were hidden in all walks of life, some were even members of the clergy. In order to survive and thrive in such a harsh

environment, there were many who were willing to ignore the edicts of God and Church and make use of these sorcerers. Many nobles retained a "court magician" to protect them from harm and destroy their enemies, and many villages and towns relied upon "cunning men" and "wise women" for love potions, healing balms, and other useful things. Even King Arthur, one of the greatest heroes of the time, relied upon a sorcerer for guidance, and though Merlin was ultimately a good man, he had his share of arrogance. Few were willing to move against known or suspected sorcerers, for they had much to fear from the Dark Art and dreaded it ever being used against them, and Leonard and his cabals flourished in this environment of fear. The stabilization of the Middle Ages helped the church to gain a firmer grip over the populace, but it did not eliminate all the cabals. Not even the destruction of Leonard in the year AD 730 by Khalid, angel of Faith, managed to end the Dark Art. It had taken root too deeply in the minds of humanity.

After Kronos was proclaimed the Demon Prince of Fate, he decided that sorcery needed to be brought under his control and a replacement found for Leonard, preferably someone less inclined to theatrics. Ultimately, it was his encounter with the white sorcerer Albertus Magnus that spurred him into action, and in the year 1250, Kronos awarded his servitor Hatiphas with the Word of Sorcery.

As Europe moved into the Renaissance, sorcerers began to infiltrate the realms of scholasticism more and more. They were monks, sages, and intellectuals who called themselves "doctors of natural philosophy" and "Hermetic scholars" as they took advantage of the developing universities and became accepted as scientists, thinkers, and even theologians. This was the high age of sorcery, where many of Europe's greatest thinkers were drawn to the Dark Art, individuals such as John Dee, Cornelius Agrippa, Michel de Nostradamus, Giordano Bruno, and the most enigmatic being of all: the Comte de Saint Germain.

The Comte wandered Europe from 1748 to 1786 (at which time he is believed to have died), working as a spy for both Frederick the Great of Prussia and Louis XV of France. He was a master of subterfuge and intrigue, famous for being both a charismatic courtier and a master of sorcery. Various legends developed around the Comte, particularly after his death. Some people believed him to be the greatest prophet since Jesus Christ, whereas others condemned him for a devil-worshipper, if not the Devil himself. Many people claimed to have seen the Comte decades after his supposed death, which caused some to believe that he had achieved immortality through his Art, whereas others have suggested that he never was human. Even the celestials do not know much about the elusive Comte de Saint Germain, and various theories have been suggested in both Heaven and Hell. Some believe that the Comte was probably a vessel of Hatiphas, where as others have suggested that he was probably some immortal human, such as Cain or the Wandering Jew. There's even a theory that the Comte was Eli, Archangel of Creation, though that is a theory that is not looked upon well by the orthodoxy of either Heaven or Hell.

After the Enlightenment, sorcerers went underground, taking advantage of the developing rationalism and disdain for supernatural belief. Many of them became respected as businessmen, philosophers, and "rational men," and rose to power while secretly continuing to delve into occult truths. Others chose to hide in plain sight, posing as stage magicians, con artists, and other dealers in fake magic, selling elixirs to the simple, and earning the scorn of the sophisticated. Many sorcerers were in a position to take advantage of the Industrial Revolution, learning to wield industrial power as well as the supernatural kind. They fed off the Essence of their laborers, sacrificing children and other renewable resources to power their profane rituals.

The publication of *The Magus* by Francis Barrett in 1801 sparked an "occult revival" among the upper classes of Europe, and magicians proliferated as bored dilettantes and artists tried their hands at astrology, alchemy, tarot, spirit summonings, and anything else that seemed like a counter-cultural lark. Hiding among these "hobbyists" were real sorcerers who used this pool of dabblers to recruit promising individuals. During this period, various demons of Factions and Fate did their part to make sorcerers the darlings of the press, theatrical, and stylish individuals who gained renown through their esoteric secrets, roguish charm, and avant-garde philosophies. When Nybbas became a Superior at the end of the century, he whole-heartedly assisted in this process, fascinated with the idea of making dark rituals the next "Big Thing." Secret societies such as the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn were created, and various prominent artists and authors such as the poet William Butler Yeats, the painter Austin Spare, and the playwright George Bernard Shaw became fascinated by these orders and the occult truths that they promised.

However, sorcerers are nothing if not egocentric, and their alliances rarely last. At the beginning of the twentieth century, most of the cabals which the Victorian age had produced were beginning to crumble as members fell to petty jealousy or delusions of grandeur and abandoned their brethren to forge their own visions of creation. The most prominent of these soul-searches was the sorcerer Aleister Crowley, who had come under the sway of a renegade Shedite of Lust known as Aiwass. Aiwass first spoke to Crowley in 1904 through Crowley's wife, Rose Kelly, who was the first of Crowley's "scarlet women" (who would serve both as sexual partners and as mediums for the Shedite). Aiwass convinced Crowley to develop cabals that would attract members through sex and debauchery instead of dry scholasticism. This inspired many other sorcerers, who began embracing ancient pagan beliefs to justify their indulgences, and recruiting magicians with similar interests to develop a stable of Essence, recruits, and warm bodies for their rituals.

One of the most malevolent of these pagan cabals was the Thule Society, which developed during the thirties in Germany. This cabal engaged in blood sacrifices to Odin and the other Aesir ethereals and was dedicated to the glorification of "the Aryan race." This cabal influenced Hitler dramatically, and many of the prominent members of his government were agents of Thule. Many of the Allies were not unaware of the dark forces arrayed against them, and agents within the British government sought out those occults left over from the Occult Revival. It is said that Aleister Crowley himself furnished rituals for the Allies, and that many of the most pivotal battles of World War II were supernatural, fought with rituals and songs instead of guns and tanks.

After the War, many sorcerers stumbled into obscurity, coming down from the "high" of shaping countries that the conflicts had provided. Many turned to drugs as a substitute, or returned to their grimoires and blasphemous intellectualism. Nybbas continued to be interested in marketing sorcery for the masses, and this was supported by many sorcerers whose pride became channeled into vanity, and a desire for fame and fortune that the Media was more than willing to provide. This was one of the sparks that ignited the Neo-Pagan movement, and books on astrology, love spells, and other forms of magic proliferated in bookstores as various people became bombarded by the occult drenched in glimmer and glitz. Many sorcerers hid their practices behind this pop-culture veneer. This is the state that modern sorcery presents to the world: it has become sanitized, publicized, and repackaged by the Media, and many people have forgotten the dark heart which beats at its center, and that it is so often a path to damnation.

The Philosophy of Occult Egomania

All sorcerers, even the good ones, are full of pride. The exertion of will that is required to perform sorcery also forces the sorcerer on a permanent ego-trip, for it is the sorcerer choosing to master creation and bending the Symphony to his will. This willful focus usually causes sorcerers to become very self-absorbed, seeing themselves as the center of the universe and more important than anyone else. In turn, this solipsism colors the sorcerers' perception of reality.

A sorcerer's arrogance warps his perception of supernatural reality, and most of them perceive the regulated and resplendent Symphony as a discordant, clashing Cacophony. This discordant view of creation also results in the atheism that many sorcerers have, as to acknowledge an ordered universe, a supreme power, or cosmic good and evil would displace the sorcerer from his place as the dominant being of creation, and ultimately entail subservience to a higher power. God is anathema to most sorcerers' pride. This selfish delusion is one that both demons and ethereals find useful, and so they usually do not dissuade sorcerers from this perspective.

Even sorcerers who believe in God often take a somewhat controversial position on divinity. Most people, as well as most angels, have a somewhat passive stance in their relationship to God. They rely on divine guidance, they submit to God, and they trust the divine plan. The most dramatic example of this are prophets, people who have become receptacles of divine visions, and channel the divine in the way that they have virtually no control over. No sorcerer would tolerate such a surrender of the self, and theistic sorcerers focus on trying to come to God instead of waiting for God to come to them. They believe that God wants humanity to unravel the riddle of creation and bring themselves into His presence. That is why God is so ineffable: He is keeping Himself hidden until humanity proves its worth. These sorcerers often argue that the Garden of Eden was a test that Adam won when he chose knowledge over immortality, and that sorcery was given by God to humanity in order to help solve His riddle and prove their master of the reality that was created for them. This theory has proven the basis for many occult faiths, such as Gnosticism and

Hermetica, and is a theory that most angels find repellent.

There is a controversial rumor (particularly favored by some servitors of Judgment) that Eli favors sorcery and has done his best to keep the Dark Art in existence. It is true that part of Eli's philosophy, "the application of will against entropy," is disturbingly similar to the sorcerous desire to bend the Cacophony to one's personal will. Furthermore, it is known that Eli favors religions and philosophies that are developed by humans, and generally endorses humans creating and defining the world on their own terms. Though not even the most zealous servitor of Dominic has been able to uncover any proof about Eli's patronage of sorcery, it is true that the Archangel of Creation demonstrates less antipathy towards sorcery than other archangels do, and is the archangel who makes the most use of white sorcerers.

Specialized Beliefs

Most sorcerers specialize in a particular kind of sorcery, and their tradition helps to define their philosophy and their general outlook. Most sorcerers can be classified either as alchemists, exorcists, necromancers, or summoners.

There are two kinds of alchemy: practical alchemy and spiritual alchemy. Practical alchemy is the process of imbuing objects with the effects of Songs or sorcerous rituals, whereas spiritual alchemy is a philosophy that derives from practical alchemy and is based around the transmutation of the body and the spirit, and the eventual achievement of immortality. In order to achieve this transcendent goal, most alchemists tirelessly hunt for the ritual known as the Philosopher's Stone, which they believe will allow them to brew the Elixir of Life. Most celestials and some alchemists believe that if such a ritual exists, it will probably imbue a material object with the Corporeal Song of Entropy, restoring youth when drunk. Other alchemists claim that the Philosopher's Stone is a more substantial ritual, and some have even suggested that it will transform a human into a celestial. This theory is, of course, scorned by all true celestials, and most humans who are aware of the true workings of the supernatural, but then sorcerers are used to scorn.

Exorcists are often the most well balanced variety of sorcerer (if a sorcerer could ever be considered well balanced), and they are also the most likely to accept the Heavenly perspective as opposed to developing their own bizarre theories. They are only the only sorcerers who have an established position post within the Catholic Church and the Celestial hierarchy, and are often sent by their superiors (both mortal and the angelic) to deal with demonic problems that for various reasons angels cannot attend to (such as situations that require the Symphony to be relatively undisturbed). Still, exorcists remain sorcerers and thus still possess an unquenchable ego. In their situation, that arrogance is focused towards making sure that all spirits that the exorcist has decided are not welcome in his presence stay away. They often have exaggerated views of their importance to Heaven, something which many angels find frustrating in the extreme.

Necromancers are almost always fascinated by death, and often believe that as death lasts longer than life, it is more important and must be understood. This often results in necromancers engaging in death-worship, a practice that Saminga is only too willing to cater to. However, along with this death-worship is often the desire to cheat death, and under the dictates of the sorcerous ego, to master both life and death. Becoming a mummy is considered to be the perfect compromise by many necromancers, since it allows them to potentially exist forever, but also places them in a death-like state to best explore mortality first-hand.

Though all sorcerers are extremely arrogant, summoners are perhaps the most so. Alchemists and necromancers each seek their own form of immortality, and exorcists purge their environment of unwanted spiritual influences, but summoners seek to master the spiritual realms and bind the inhabitants to their will. Of all the kinds of sorcerers, summoners are the ones most likely to dedicate themselves to solving "the riddle of God," and there are rumors of an elusive summoning ritual that calls forth an aspect of God that can be directly communicated with. Most people dismiss this as silly superstition, but as with the alchemists who seek the Philosopher's Stone, the summoners ignore the scorn and continue with their research.

The Ex-Aliens

A New Faction For *Feng Shui*

by **Loki Carbis**

The Ex-Aliens are members of a race who first came to Earth in the year 1947. They were slimy, bug-eyed, many tentacled horrors not unlike those from a 1950's horror film. The Aliens, who possess limited shape-changing abilities, often shifted into human form, finding it more useful on a world that seemed designed for humans. They were bent on nothing more than conquest, intending to subjugate humanity as they had subjugated any number of other races. Their invasion used superior intellect and science (based on a technology very similar to that of the Architects' arcanowave theories) to defeat the puny weapons of humanity, and within seven years, the iron yoke of alien oppression was known across the entire planet. Organized resistance ended after the public execution of the Human Liberation Front's leader, Jack Kennedy, in 1963. Knowing nothing of Chi, the aliens had nonetheless succeeded in capturing almost every Chi site in the world. With this powering them, their rule was unassailable.

The aliens were only dethroned when they were caught out by the Critical Shift that swept the Four Monarchs to power. In the now-gone era of the Four Monarchs, they were serially reincarnated as demons using strange sorcery. But they retained their memories of how things had previously been. They knew that something had happened, but what exactly it was they were unsure. Many of them suffered from severe mental problems due to the effects of the Critical Shift, which diminished their effectiveness as a faction even further. What little power they retained was lost in the subsequent Critical Shift, which replaced the Monarchs with the Ascended -- and intensified the aliens' mental problems.

Now, in the world of the Ascended, they are strangers in a strange land, whose past is that of aliens left behind in the 1940s by an abortive invasion (the so-called "saucer-flap" of the late 40s) that was abandoned by their high command when it was discovered that the humans had atomic weapons -- although not without leaving a few stragglers behind. The stranded aliens have tried to blend into human society, and most of them work for a large corporation which is a front for their interests, using reverse-engineered alien high technology to create electrical goods, computer hardware and computer software for human markets. They are now wealthy -- but wealth in human terms means little to them, and although they control a few Feng Shui sites, it is only through coincidence.

These, the Ex-Aliens, also have to contend with the unfortunate fact that the most recent critical shift has somehow robbed them of most of their shape changing ability. They can now use their powers only to change from the form of one human to another. And most of them are, by now, howling mad.

The Ex-Aliens exist only in the Modern Juncture, as they have no access to the Netherworld. Were they to discover the Netherworld, they would pose a danger such as the world has never seen. Fortunately, there are as yet no Innerwalkers among their number, and the aliens understand nothing of the importance of Chi. They are slowly rebuilding their arcanowave technology and their influence in human society, hampered by the nature of the new reality. Although they know very little of the Secret War, the Ex-Aliens are particularly interested in the Architects and Jammers, since both these groups frequently employ arcanowave gear. The Ex-Aliens wish to learn more of this technology, and they are equally as pleased to capture arcanowave gear as live members of either of these groups, although they would prefer to capture both -- interrogation having proven a better source of information than reverse engineering.

To their earlier aims of conquest and subjugation the Ex-Aliens have added the following goals: to regain their true forms, and to find out what causes critical shifts. So far, they have met with limited success in these goals. They have not yet succeeded in undoing either of the critical shifts they have experienced, since they did not land on Earth until long afterwards, and thus have access to only one juncture. Although the aliens are not Innerwalkers (and thankfully, never have been), they are able to retain their memories of past lives, even as the world shifts around them. They still know who they are, despite two critical shifts and the attendant serial reincarnations. This should not be considered a shtick, as all Innerwalkers possess this ability, although it should be noted that many of the Ex-Aliens suffer from a

form of multiple personality disorder, with one personality for each of the realities they have lived in -- one a secretive spy, one an enigmatic demon, and one a sadistic slave driver.

The Ex-Aliens have two unique shticks that set them apart from the other factions of the Secret War. The first of these is that they are able to sense when someone they encounter is an Innerwalker. This shtick costs 0 Chi and 0 Shots to use -- it should more or less be considered to be constantly working at any time the Ex-Alien is conscious. This ability makes them a unique and unpredictable danger to all groups in the Secret War. The aliens have been known to capture and interrogate Innerwalkers, and although they have thus-far learned little of importance, the day cannot be too far off when they pose as serious a threat as any other group. Indeed, their lack of knowledge of the true stakes of the secret war makes them more dangerous in some ways, since they do not understand the nature of Chi, Chi sites or the Netherworld.

The second shtick is the shape changing mentioned above. This is identical to the Transformation shtick listed under Creature Powers in the ***Feng Shui*** rules, with the exception that only human forms can be assumed, and that the time spent is only 5 shots, not 9. The Ex-Alien must buy this shtick each time it assumes a new human form -- if it does not have enough experience to buy the shtick, it cannot transform.

What the other factions know about the Ex-Aliens:

- **The Jammers:** nothing
- **The Four Monarchs:** although each of the Monarchs would recall the demonic guise of the Ex-Aliens from their own rule, they are unaware that these "demons" still exist.
- **The Ascended:** Certain members of the Ascended are aware that there is a rival corporate conspiracy that has from time to time thwarted the plans of the Order of the Wheel or (less often) the Jade Wheel society. But they know little of it, and believe it to be merely a human conspiracy.
- **The Guiding Hand:** nothing
- **The Eaters of the Lotus:** the sorcerers have been trying to summon the demons who troubled the Four Monarchs for some time now, with no luck at all. But as they refine their scryings, sooner or later they will find the Ex-Aliens. Whether these two disparate factions could ever agree with each other enough to work together is another question.
- **The Architects of the New Flesh:** Some of the Buro's comptrollers have noticed that arcanowave technology that is left in the Modern juncture seems to be going missing at a higher than usual rate, although most of them suspect that is the Jammers who are responsible. Still, the matter will be investigated, sooner or later.
- **The Dragons:** nothing

Plot Hooks

- A regular NPC character (or a player character, if there's one who wants to do it) has been replaced by a shape changed alien, who intends to spy on the characters and try to learn more about the Netherworld. This can be done at any time in the campaign, although the best time to introduce this plot is just after the player characters have caused a minor Critical Shift of some sort. There are two ways to play this: quiet and loud. The quiet version is to slowly and subtly hint at the replacement until the players figure it out, and is best suited for campaigns that emphasize character. The loud version is to hit the players over the head with it, and is best suited for campaigns where action takes precedence.
- A mysterious organization has come into being, which very quickly rounds up any abominations who are left running around in the Modern day juncture. The first player characters are likely to know about it is when the Architects take it upon themselves to investigate this organization with extreme prejudice.

The Lost World of the Ex-Aliens

Two Critical Shifts ago, the Earth was quite a different place. The changed dates of the Junctures listed below reflect the actual position in time of each Juncture when these events occurred. Before the rise of the Four Monarchs engineered a critical shift, the world was not unlike the one we know today, and the Junctures looked like this:

13 through 62 AD: no change

1801 through 1843: no particular change, although scientific know-how advanced faster in this timeline. The Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison of this world were each shrewder and more tolerant than their serial reincarnations have proved to be, and were able to work together easily. The combined genius of these two men created a high tech paradise straight out of Gernsbackian science fiction.

Modern (1947 through 1989): The alien invasion began in 1947, and concluded with their victory in 1954. From that year through to 1989, when the Four Monarchs' Critical Shift swept them to power, the aliens ruled the Earth.

2007 through 2049 (and beyond): A century later, humanity had proven to be more cunning and more adaptable (and much more quick-breeding) than its conquerors, and a revolution in 2037 saw them all hunted down and killed, after which humanity used its captured technology to reach the stars and hunt down the home planet of the aliens. After a generation of war, the two races finally made peace with each other, and went on to establish an inter-stellar civilisation.

Appendix Z

Gambling & Dice Games in *GURPS*

by S. E. Mortimer

"The dice of Zeus fall ever luckily."
--Sophocles

Introduction

Gaming is a common form of entertainment in taverns, and playing dice was the most popular form of gaming. Dice were small and portable, and can be played anywhere there is a small, flat surface. This article concentrates on some of the actual games that were played, but for information on dice themselves, see the ["A Brief History Of Dice"](#).

If the players wish to engage in gambling there are two ways a GM can model it. He may choose to use the character's Gambling skill. For example, a contest of skills is made between characters, or between the House and the character. The character bets his stake and rolls. The outcome of the skill rolls determines who wins and how much.

However, with dice games, the outcome is more random and the character's skill has little effect (though some slight of hand could be used if he wished to cheat; see below). For purely random outcomes, the GM and players might like to engage in some of the dice games that were actually played in historical taverns. After all, they are likely to have plenty of dice lying around. Playing one of the following games would add more flavour to the scenario than if simple abstract dice rolls were used to resolve the contest.

Cheating: If a character wins a Slight of Hand contest then he can successfully introduce "loaded" dice into the game. If the players don't have loaded dice then the GM can simulate them by allowing the player to roll the dice two or three times and accept the best result.

Luck: Some *GURPS* advantages directly affect the outcome of random chance. For example, players with the Luck advantage will be allowed to reroll a bad roll in a dice game just like any other situation.

A Selection of Dice Games

All the following games require six-sided dice. The number of dice required is listed next to the name of the game. Unless stated otherwise, at the beginning of each round, each player bets the same amount before the dice are cast. Each player's bet is called his *stake* or *ante*. In most games all the stakes are piled together in the middle -- called the *pot*. The winner of the round collects all of the money in the pot. The *Caster* is the person who currently has control of the dice during a game. The *House* is the establishment that is hosting the game.

High Rolls (1, 2, or 3 dice): The simplest of all dice games. All the players make a bet and take it in turns to roll the dice. The winner is the person who rolls the highest total. If two players roll the highest score then they roll again until a clear winner is determined.

As Many On One As On Two (3 dice): Each person rolls one die to see who goes first. Then each player rolls that die again. This is the target. The players then roll the other two dice. The winner is the first to get a total on those two dice that equals to the target die.

Pair and Ace (3 dice): Each person rolls one die to see who goes first. Players then take it in turns to roll the dice. The first to roll a pair on two dice and a "one" on the third die wins.

Riffa (3 dice): Each player rolls three dice until he gets a pair. Then the third die is rerolled. The highest total on all three dice wins.

Thirty-One (2 or 3 dice): The Caster rolls the dice and keeps a running total until he gets close to 31. If he goes over 31 he loses. The dice then pass to the next player who does the same thing. Whoever gets closest to 31 wins. If two players get the same total, the person who reached it with the fewest rolls wins. If the number of rolls is also the same then the pot carries over to next round.

Marlota (3 dice): The Caster rolls a target score for each player. Acceptable target numbers range from 7 to 14. Keep rolling until each player has a different target. Once this is done, the Caster keeps rolling until he gets one of the target numbers. If he gets his own target, he wins. If he gets an opponent's number, that person wins. The dice are then handed to the next player.

Salallamah (3 dice): For two players. The Caster rolls until he gets three of a kind. If the result is more than 10, he wins the pot and remains the Caster in the next round. If the total is less than 10, he loses the pot and passes the dice to the other player.

In and Inn (4 dice): Each player rolls the dice, resulting in three possible outcomes:

1. Four of a kind or two doubles is called an "In & an Inn"
2. A double (or a triple) is called an "Inn"
3. No doubles is called an "Out"

An *Out* is beaten by an *Inn*. An *Inn* is beaten by an *In & an Inn*. If everyone rolls the same, the pot stays in the middle. If two players tie, they roll again or split the pot between them.

Hazard (2 dice): The ancestor of the modern game, "craps." It is alleged that it was first played by Crusaders in the 12th century and was originally known as *Hazart* or *Asart*. There are several variations but this is the simplest variant:

The Caster rolls the dice after placing a bet against the House or another player. This first roll is called the "Main." If the Main is 7 or 11, the Caster wins. If the Main is not 7 or 11, a second roll is required -- called the "Chance." The Chance is rerolled until either it equals the Main, in which case the Caster wins, or a 7 or 11 is rolled, in which case the Caster loses. Other players can place bets wherever they like: on the number that comes up on the Main or the Chance, whether the Caster wins or loses, the value of the losing number, etc.

Ship, Captain, and Mate (5 dice): Frequently played in dockside taverns. Each player gets three throws. He has to get a 6 (ship), a 5 (captain), and a 4 (mate), in that order. That is, the Caster must throw the 6 before or at the same time as the 5, and the 5 before or at the same time as the 4. When each number is successfully thrown, that die is removed from play. The total of the two dice left over is his score and the other players have to beat that total. If the Caster makes his Ship, Captain, and Crew on his first or second throw, he can use the other throws to try to get a higher score on the remaining two dice.

Pyramid Review

Dungeons & Dragons for Dummies

Published by [Wiley Publishing, Inc.](#)

Written by Bill Slavicsek & Richard Baker

Edited by Christopher Morris

Art by Rich Tennant, Des Hanley, Hugh Jamieson, Rob Lazzaretti, Todd Lockwood, Steve Prescott, Wayne Reynolds, Arnie Swekel, Steve Tappin, Lars Grant West, & Sam Wood

432-page b&w softcover plus fold-out sample dungeon map; \$19.99

The . . . *for Dummies* series has, for years, been taking subjects thought too impenetrable by the general public and making them easily accessible with gentle and patient guidance. *Dungeons & Dragons*, the poster child for a hobby thought by most to be too weird, complex, or daunting to be entered lightly, gets the business in *Dungeons & Dragons for Dummies*.

Quoth Drew Carey, "It's almost a good idea."

It's certainly a terrific way to market the brand, straddling as it does the hobby and mass markets with such a format. Indeed, the first 40 pages sound like a marketing tool for Wizards of the Coast, and most of the references, being other books from the Coast, cement this view. Occasionally a predictable mention of Tolkien, yes, topping a list of "novels to inspire" offered as an afterthought in the traditional Part of Tens. But 99.99% of the manual is begat of Wizards knowing on which side its bread is buttered.

And it's written by two company notables: Bill Slavicsek and Richard Baker, both of whom have had their hands in the official creative process more than once. These two gentlemen take us step by step through creating characters, learning which end of the sword goes where, and stepping up to the plate as DM when the call is heard. It should be mentioned that there's very little here about actual roleplaying. This isn't meant as a criticism; buyers should simply be aware that when they say *Dungeons & Dragons*, they mean this volume is all about decoding the *d20 System*. There are a few crumbs about how to stay in character and do the play-acting bit, but these are heavily outweighed by understanding what goes into the paper and pencil end of things.

What *is* meant as a criticism is: Very little in this book isn't in the three core *Dungeons & Dragons* manuals (or any other self-respecting RPG book, come to that). It's not culled verbatim, but there's not much here that demystifies things for people, at least no better than the product itself. In most cases when they publish a *Dummies* book, it's assumed that you have something on the subject -- if you're learning Visual Basic, you have a copy of the program at hand. So it is with *Dungeons & Dragons*; you ought to have those three works on your desk. But since this book is supposed to be a supplement to those, it should somehow work as a complement. Repeating the same material a different way isn't going to help anyone. This doesn't mean it isn't presented simply, but if this is the simplest explanation then the core books are themselves not far from "Dummies" manuals.

The irony here is that the book will be most immediately useful to seasoned players. There's some A-1 advice here about figuring out the best combinations of facts and figures. Should you attack harder or more often? Should you

focus on offense or defense? That stuff, it's gold. For ease of use at any level of play, there are trees of feats and skills so you can plan for advancement in later levels, or see the fastest way to get that boss new feat or prestige class you want. This takes a lot of the headaches out of character creation -- if you're playing one of four classes.

Since it's all rudimentary stuff, they focus on the fighter, rogue, cleric, and sorcerer. Similar narrow focus is placed on racial choices. Other classes (and races, and . . .) aren't ignored, and a lot of the material here has "If you're going to use another class" tips, but they felt it necessary not to hammer on all the classes, which looks to have been the right choice.

As it's a . . . *for Dummies* book, they've put the brakes on a lot of the artwork. Most of it is suggestive bits of scenery or creature pictures harvested from various ***Dungeons & Dragons*** products. Rich Tennant, long a fixture of this line, provides more of his amusing Fifth Wave strips as chapter bumpers, and he shows he can keep up the laughs no matter the geeky subject matter.

The work is light in tone, in accordance with precedent for these references, with a few bits of humor thrown in for good measure. It's conversational, but also has a number of typos and oversights. Not that the book brims with them, but sometimes it does get in the way -- rules about your character beginning to die at 1 hit point vs. -1 hit point, that kind of thing is exactly the wrong spot to confuse the fresh faces in the crowd.

Perhaps the book (and its problem) is best summed up by the introduction: "The core rulebooks aren't written for novices." This neck-snapping admission should come as a surprise to many, since editions 3 and 3.5 were out several years before (the most recent iteration of) ***Dungeons & Dragons Basic***, something else they peddle in these pages. Just when do we have enough material to start a game?

Certainly if you're going to write a book, you'll want your own company's name on it; that's just good business. But it's the hobby itself that is steeped in confusion, and new players have to cross that hurdle before anything else. They need the process and 30 years worth of reputation decoded for them, not just this system in particular. You can't claim the book isn't "dumbed down" enough for newbies, but ***Dungeons & Dragons for Dummies*** seems to be more interested in its own press and marketing than actually clearing anything up for those who aren't already fans.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Battleball

[Battleball/](#)

Published by [Milton Bradley/Hasbro](#)

Two-player boardgame; \$20.00

Battleball is a mass-market game that is billed as the future of football, with cybernetic players making carnage out of each other as they wrestle for the ball. It's a theme you've probably seen before, and it also has the trappings of a gamer's game: polyhedral dice in an assortment of sizes, a staggered-square game board that has the connection properties of a hex map, special powers for each of the teams, and sculpted miniatures. There are 22 plastic miniatures in all, and they look pretty nice -- comparable to **HeroClix** in quality and detail.

Each team consists of 11 players, each with a corresponding die type. The three running backs are played using the red d20s that come with the game. This is nicely represented by a red ring around the base of each running back figure. We found ourselves not thinking of them as "running backs" at all, but as "red" or "20" players. Two green-ringed players use the green d12s, two blue ones use d10s, two black ones use d8s, and two yellow ones use d6s. One of the yellow players on each team takes up two spaces on the map; you roll 2d6 for these big guys and pick between the two dice.

The game starts out with each team behind their 20 yard line and with the ball in the center of the field. (The future of football does not allow for subtleties like kick-offs.) Players then alternate turns: Moving one of their players and then either resolving a tackle or handing off the ball.

To move a player, you roll the player's die type and move them up to the number of spaces rolled. He may not move through other figures or through carnage tokens. If he passes through a square containing a ball, he can pick it up. If he enters a square adjacent to an opposing player, he must stop.

When you have a player adjacent to an opposing player, you must tackle. You and your opponent each roll a die corresponding to your respective players. The player with the higher roll is removed from the map and replaced with a carnage token. If the winning player rolls a 1, then the loser is removed for the entire game; otherwise, he returns after half-time. Both players are removed if the rolls tie, so a tackle *always* results in at least one player being removed from the field.

If there are no players in position to tackle, if you have possession of the ball, and if you have another player adjacent to the ball carrier, then you may attempt a handoff. You roll the dice for each player. If they match, the ball is fumbled. Otherwise, the handoff is successful.

An optional rule allows for passing. To pass, you roll the die for the would-be receiver and add the result of a football-shaped d6. The total must equal or exceed the intended range of the pass.

Play continues until one team carries the ball into the opposing end zone. The first team to score two points wins. (The periods are called the first half, second half, and overtime, but these names are just windowdressing.)

There are further details, like the special powers available to each team, but the core game mechanics are both the strength and weakness of **Battleball**. It's clever, easy to learn, plays quickly, and makes good use of assorted dice. Associating a d20 with the running back at once makes him a good runner, a poor tackler, and good at hand offs. Associating smaller dice with other players is sufficient to make them slower, tougher, and less nimble.

Despite the gear to be a gamer's game, however, **Battleball** never rises much beyond its ages-8-and-up apocalyptic-football premise.

The game requires a small amount of strategy. If the other team has possession of the ball, then it's essential to spread out your players so as to block possible paths to the goal. If you leave more than two spaces between your players, the other team's running back can sprint through the opening to score.

Randomness in the game tends to make further strategy irrelevant. The problem is in the core game mechanic itself. Other than the heavy tackle, who rolls two dice and picks one, each player is associated with a uniform probability distribution. Running backs are supposed to be fast, but one quarter of the time they'll move no more than 5 spaces. Upset tackles with the weaker player smearing the stronger seem all too common. With a different game mechanic, the randomness of flat probability distributions might be mitigated by making an outcome depend on a series of rolls. But in **Battleball**, every tackle is a do-or-die affair. The Law of Large Numbers never comes into play.

Battleball is a raucous brawl in which your choices may not have much effect on the outcome of the game. This can be really frustrating, but it depends in part on your frame of mind and on your expectations. (I found the experience rather like that of playing **Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot.**)

This game comes with a lot of interesting parts and lets you roll dice to turn fields of players into fiery carnage. If this is enough for you, it's a fun time and a good buy. If you are irritated by games that invite you to make choices but scoff at your attempts to make them strategically, however, avoid **Battleball**.

--P.D. Magnus

Pyramid Pick

Battlestations

Published by [Gorilla Games](#)

Designed by Jeff Siadek & Jason Siadek

Cover by A.D. Hamilton with Patrick Morgan

Illustrated by A.D. Hamilton

Module Art by Todd Boyce

48 double sided, full color 3½-inch square Starship Modules, eight full color 8½ by 11-inch Hex Maps, 160 full color die cut Counters, 32 full color die cut Hex Markers, ten glass bead Markers, 128 full color Character stand-ups, six six-sided dice, & 112-page perfect bound black & white rulebook; \$49.95

In most space combat games, players control one or more ships, maneuvering them around to either obtain particular objectives or shoot down other ships. What gets left out of such games is the crew of such vessels, except in an abstract fashion. Other games do consider the role of the crew, each player controlling the actions of a single crewman in more detail. FASA's *Star Trek III Starship Combat Roleplaying Game* is such an exception, with players as bridge officers, taking orders from the captain, allocating power, operating sensors, weapons, deflector shields, the ship's helm, and so on. Of course, this just has the player characters at the appropriate bridge station, but what if in the midst of a game, characters could leave their stations and run through the ship, perhaps to operate another station, such as the teleport system instead of the guns, or to repel boarders? All the while the ship is zooming through space?

This is exactly what **Battlestations** from Gorilla Games lets you do. It is a board game with strong roleplaying elements, in which players create members of the U.R.E.F. (or Universal Republic Expeditionary Force) to crew standard-sized and designed vessels sent out to perform important missions. The strong roleplaying element means that, unlike most board games, **Battlestations** requires one player to be the referee. It is designed for two to eight players aged 12 and up, and is best played with at four players plus the referee.

Weighing in at 4 lbs., **Battlestations** comes richly appointed. Besides the 112-page rulebook or *Universal Republic Expeditionary Force Training Manual*, the box contains 48 Starship Modules; eight hex maps with either a reference Play Aid or a Ship Control Card on the reverse side; and oodles of counters and markers. *All* of this comes in thick die cut cardboard and in vibrant full color. If any of the components do not quite match this high quality set by the rest, it is the character stand-ups, which are done on a lighter card stock and not quite as durable or as eye-catching. The rulebook is very well-written, explaining everything in an easy to understand fashion. Its fun illustrations serve to give **Battlestations** a very cartoon, space opera-like, and frantic feel. The index in particular, is thorough, excellent, and intelligently doubles as a glossary.

The Starship Modules are the game's most eye-catching component. Each is 3½-inch square and marked with a five-by-five square grid. They come in 10 types: Cannon, Engine, Helm, Hull Stabilizer, Hyperdrive, Life Support, Missile Bay, Science Bay, Teleporter, and Tractor beam, each performing one or more functions. Some Modules are marked with a colored star, indicating that the equipment's function needs to have a character there to operate it in battle,

although a bot or robotized mechanical assistant can be assigned to a station when no live crew is available. In other words, these are the "battlestations" of the game's title. The star colors match those of the character professions.

Starship design is standardized, each ship type requiring a particular set of Modules. Thus a Scout Ship is built with one Cannon, Helm, Hyperdrive, Life Support, Missile Bay, and three Engine Modules, while all U.R.E.F. ships are required to carry a Science Bay. The layout of the Modules varies from race to another, as does the single advantage that each race builds into its ships. For example, all Human ships have improved Helm use, while Silicoid vessels are constructed with an inherent Hull Stabilizer. The rulebook contains the designs for five different starships, from the humble scout to the brawny dreadnought, plus an outpost, a starbase, a starlab, a freighter, and two small craft designs, a shuttle and a skiff.

Characters are defined by their race, profession, and skills. Besides Humans, the other races are the ergovoric (or energy eating) tumbleweed-like Canosians, the clay-like Silicoids; the tentacular Tentacs; the many-handed jack-like floating Xeloxians; and the three-armed three-legged furry cockroach-like Zoallans. A character's key attributes are his Hands (what he can carry), Move, Target# (how hard he is to hit), Hit points, and Luck, which is spent to re-roll dice. Skills are limited to five broad types: Athletics, Combat, Engineering, Piloting, and Science. A player assigns between zero and four points to these skills, with the highest skill being his character's Profession, which also determines both his role and station aboard ship. Thus the Marine with a high Combat skill mans the Cannon and Missile Bay, and carries out Ship's Security and Boarding Actions on enemy vessels, while the Scientist runs the Science Bay and Teleporter, while also computes FTL astrogation, upgrades equipment, and dispenses medical attention. All characters must have a minimum Athletics skill of one, and this skill cannot be a character's profession. In addition every character has two special abilities, one for their race, and the second selected from a list of 60. Optional rules allow for the use of psionics.

Mechanically, **Battlestations** is very simple. A Player rolls two dice and adds the appropriate skill to beat a GM determined target number. Luck, a character's Profession, and some special abilities allow re-rolls. Personal combat is kept simple and deadly, with the average starting Human probably only able to take a couple of knife wounds or blaster shots before dying (both weapons do 1d6 damage, and the Human's Hit Points will not be more than nine). Thankfully, the U.R.E.F. values the crew highly and keeps a back-up clone prepared just in case of a character's death.

Battlestations is played first in Campaign turns, comprised of mission set-up, carrying it out, and its aftermath. The players' ship, initially a Scout, warps in and the crew conducts any planned upgrades to personnel equipment, ship's bots, or Modules. After a mission, characters can claim the spoils of war (including prize money from captured vessels), revive dead crew, repair the ship, and requisition another Ship Module. These can be swapped with existing Modules to match the needs of mission, and once the crew has three or more spare Modules, they can upgrade to a bigger ship.

A mission itself is played out in rounds divided into six phases, further comprised of 10 steps. A round starts out with Power Generation, the Engineer allocating power from the Engine (a point per Engine Module) to Helm, then Guns, Shields, and again to Helm if the ship has more than three Engine Modules. The ten steps cover ship and missile movement, collisions, player and enemy actions, and so on. During this time, a Marine will fire the ship's Cannon or launch from the Missile Bay, either Warhead, Science Probe, or Boarding Missile. A Scientist will maintain the shields from the Science Bay or conduct a Scan to obtain Targeting Lock or ECM. The Teleporter can deliver boarding parties or bombs onto enemy ships. The Tractor beam can be used to grab objects in space, including enemy missiles. The Pilot mans the helm, maneuvering the ship to best advantage while trying to keep it going out of control.

Most Modules can be used once per round and expend power in doing so. Everything changes when a ship is damaged or boarded, with characters rushing to repel the interlopers or repair the damage. Module status is either functioning, damaged and non-functioning, or slagged and cannot be repaired until the ship returns to space dock. Shields reduce damage, but any damage will hurt the hull and increase the possibility of a ship exploding. Missiles are very deadly in this regard.

Successfully completing a mission gains a character Experience that be spent to improve skills, Credits to buy equipment, and Prestige to improve his Rank. Improving the latter also increases a character's Luck, Hit Points, and

grants him another special ability. It also gives him a better title.

The rulebook includes over two dozen missions, Boot Camp being a good start for a campaign. Each is simply sketched out, including strategy notes and suggestions for variants. They include kidnapping a dignitary, assaulting a star lab, and locating a lost ship. All assume that characters are U.R.E.F. members, enforcing the Universal Republic Senate's will, keeping the "peace," and admitting new cultures -- whether they want it or not. The background is described in a couple of pages, including a time line, which suggests that the Universal republic is on the verge of civil war over continued Human cultural and political imperialism.

Battlestations is definitely space opera; it's sort of *Classic Traveller* meets *Star Trek* by way of *Star Frontiers*, though without the latter's cumbersome nature. Indeed, **Battlestations** is slick and simple, with plenty of option for players to adjust their ships and equipment, while combat is perilous, but offset by a high luck factor. The box has enough missions to keep a campaign going for some time, plus guidelines are given for the GM to create more, and the publisher has promised expansions. Above all, playing **Battlestations** is frantic and fun, made all the easier by the clear, simple, and well explained design and the fine components.

--Matthew Pook

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



The Enduring Legend of Shallow Neck

Okay; how many of you are looking to incorporate some Deep Throat action into your RPGs? (Wow . . . I never thought I'd have an even remotely acceptable reason for using a sentence like that in this column. It must be Christmas.)

For those of you who are in the dark, "Deep Throat" was the name for the anonymous source used by *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein for their investigation of the Watergate break-in . . . an investigation that eventually led to the resignation of President Nixon. Just this week, the identity of this informant has been revealed to be W. Mark Felt, the number two person in charge of the FBI at the time. I'm sure this revelation would've had more impact on me if I actually cared beyond an, "Oh, neat; a three-decade mystery has been revealed." But given how guessing the identity of this informant was a Washington parlor game for decades, I'm guessing it's pretty significant in many circles.

(For those of you interested in more info, check out the [Wikipedia](#) article on the subject. And for our international readers, I apologize for the America-centric column.)

Anyway, the notion of Deep Throat -- either an extension of the actual mysterious person or a parody with similar methodologies -- has popped up in so many forms of popular culture that it's always bordered on the cliché. But it's such a cool idea that it's hard to overexpose it. And, as many things do, the revelation of Deep Throat got me to thinking about the possibilities for using such a mystery in gaming.

Now, I've written in the past about various other means of working mysteries into games (although I confess to being too lazy right now to sift through the 18 jillion search results from when I've used the word "mystery" in my column). And, to better serve the corporate masters whose electrodes I have implanted dangerously close to my cerebellum, I note that the recently released [GURPS Mysteries](#) has plenty of tricks and tips for weaseling in such a puzzle into a campaign. So I thought I'd spend this column deconstructing the Deep Throat idea, and see what we can learn for our own games.

Deep Throat was a known secret. Let's start with the obvious: Deep Throat was fascinating because 1) no one knew who it was, but 2) they knew it existed. As a counterexample, if Woodward and Bernstein had merely published stories and no one knew there was this mysterious source, the revelation of that source would've been nothing terribly special. Thus, in an RPG, it's wise to make a mystery that people *know* is a mystery . . . for example, if a king confessed that he had an illegitimate child within his court, but would offer no other details.

Deep Throat was a secret that people actually knew the answer to. Unlike, say, the modern-day mystery (or non-mystery) of who wrote Shakespeare's plays where we have absolutely no way of being certain today, someone knew the real identity of Deep Throat. In fact, at least *three* people knew the identity: two reporters and the source itself. The existence of people who knew the answer -- people that others could interact with -- changes the very nature of the mystery. (Remember the truism about ["Whenever two people interact, each wants something"](#)? The answer to half that equation is obvious when you're talking to someone who knows a big secret.)

Deep Throat was going to be revealed. Unlike many mysteries where the answer may or may not ever be known, part of the Deep Throat mystique stemmed from the fact that everyone knew the answer would be revealed, and under what circumstances the answer would be revealed (which was, traditionally, the death of the Deep Throat). And, since there were at least two other people who knew the answer, the odds were remarkably good that the identity would, in fact, be revealed someday. In this way, Deep Throat existed as a real-world mystery movie; you know in such a film that the answers will be laid out by the closing credits . . . but the fun comes in trying to figure out the solution *before* then.

It might be interesting to toy with the notion of time in campaigns with long-lived races; what if, in an urban magic game, we knew that the true author of Shakespeare's plays would be revealed by elves who knew him 500 years after his death?

Deep Throat was important. Unlike many mysteries -- such as what Thomas Pynchon looks like -- the underlying reason why the Deep Throat mystery existed was consequential, and had long-term repercussions. If you're going to try inserting a long-term secret like this, make sure the underlying story behind that secret is significant (if not the actual repercussions of the revelation itself).

Deep Throat had to be someone you'd heard of. This is one of the interesting ones. Unlike, say, the identity of the Unibomber (which, at best, can elicit a shrug and a sigh of relief from those who don't know him), it was virtually certain that the identity of Deep Throat was someone that people had heard of . . . at least, those who keep up with such mysteries.

Now, many people's wishful thinking took this notion too far; as the Wikipedia article I linked to earlier says, a poll indicated that a majority of people thought William Rehnquist was the source, while 2% had Deep Throat pegged as Pope John Paul II. (Frankly, the thought of a chain-smoking Pope meeting with reporters in a parking garage and shiftily handing over a file folder containing information on Nixon fills me with a warm glee.)

So if you're going to craft such a mystery in your own game, make sure that the suspect -- when revealed -- is someone the players will have heard of (even if briefly). And, to keep the Deep Throat conspiracy as true as possible, make sure the PCs interact with dozens or even hundreds of possible candidates.

Although there's a lot of other fertile ground for incorporating such a mystery into the game, I think I've rattled enough about the subject already. Give it a thought, give it a try, and have fun. If you pay heed to some of this advice, your players won't find the idea of a Deep Throat hard to swallow.

--*Steven Marsh*

Icosahedron Adventures

The Alchemist's Shoppe More Mystic Materials For *D20 System* Games

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Wedged between the simply well-crafted and the genuinely fantastic in the *d20 System* equipment lists are the unusual items of alchemy. Ranging from the merely convenient sunrod and tindertwig to the offensive tanglefoot bag and thunderstone, alchemical items aren't strictly speaking magical (they have no magical aura), but they aren't purely mundane either. They fall in a gray zone of things that don't belong in a purely realistic campaign, but can be appropriate in low-magic fantasy, pulp adventure, or over-the-top action games. They are the province of the diamonds that create lasers with nothing more than sunlight, dragons that fly through sheer wing-power despite their weight/lift ratio, and psychic detectives.

Alchemical items all follow some group rules. If they grant a bonus, it's an alchemical bonus. This allows them to work hand in hand with magic items (which tend to grant enhancement bonuses) and mundane gear (which grant equipment or circumstance bonuses), but prevents them from working together (there's no point in drinking five vials of antitoxin at once). All alchemical items are created using the Craft (alchemy) skill, and only spellcasters may do so (despite the fact alchemical items have no specific spell prerequisites). The craft DC for an alchemical item ranges from high (20) to higher-than-masterwork (25).

It's fair to assume any character with Craft (alchemy) and an alchemist's lab can identify alchemical materials. The base time for this is 10 minutes, and the character can take 10 or take 20 (though obviously taking 20 requires considerably more time). The DC to correctly identify an item is 5 less than the DC to make it (thus identifying a tindertwig is DC 5, while identifying a tanglefoot bag is DC 20).

Additional alchemical items can add utility to a game with few magic items, or flavor to a region far from the PCs' homes. They can also be used to allow alchemists PCs and NPCs a wider range of options for their Craft skill, or to act as mid-range treasure (more useful than purely mundane items, but not as powerful as potions, scrolls, and elixirs). They can even be the province of a band of assassins or similar group that seeks to avoid detection (since, unlike magic items, alchemical materials can't be detected with a simple spell).

Alchemical Item	Cost	Weight	Craft DC
Alchemical Catalyst			
Standard	100 gp	1 lb.	25
Greater	250 gp	1 lb.	25
Sovereign	500 gp	1 lb.	25
Benecord	10 gp	–	20
Bloodrock Whetstone	1,000 gp	1 lb.	25
Boomhammer	462 gp	5 lb.	20 (weaponsmith)
Caltrips	75 gp	8 lb.	25
Darklight Candle	200 gp	–	25
Firevine Wine	100 gp	1 lb.	20
Flamerod	200 gp.	10 lb.	25
Flashpot	40 gp	1 lb.	20
Heating Pot	25 gp	1 lb.	20
Itching Powder	50 gp	3 lb.	25
Medicinals			
Brown Salve	20 gp	1/2 lb.	25
Eyebright	50 gp	1/2 lb.	25

Fevertea	45 gp.	1/2 lb.	20
Health Soup	30 gp	2 lb.	20
Red Salve	35 gp	1/2 lb.	25
White Salve	50 gp	1/2 lb.	25
Woundbind	15 gp	–	20
Peaceweed	50 gp	1/4 lb.	20
Preserved leach	35 gp.	1/2 lb.	25
Shadow oil	50 gp.	1 lb.	20
Slowtinder	5 gp	–	25
Smoke Bomb	100 gp	5 lb.	20
Travel-Loaf (per day)	5 gp	1/4 lb	20
Verminbane Pot	20 gp.	5 lb.	25
Witchrod	100 gp	1 lb.	25
Wrestler's Grease	50 gp	1 lb.	25

Alchemical Catalyst

Alchemical catalyst is a thin liquid that can be mixed with or injected into any other alchemical material that creates an effect forcing a target to make a saving throw. The DC of this save is increased. The increase is a +2 alchemical bonus for a standard catalyst, a +4 alchemical bonus for a greater catalyst, and a +6 alchemical bonus for a sovereign catalyst.

Benecord

Benecord is a short length of cured leather that has been coated with alchemical compounds that react to healing potions, but nothing else. A single benecord can be dampened with the liquid from one potion. If the potion heals hp of damage, and does nothing else, the benecord turns blue. If the potion does anything else, the cord does nothing. A benecord can be used only once.

Bloodrock Whetstone

This is a fragile, chalk-like blood-red stone pressed from ground rocks, ash, and glass. A slashing or piercing weapon sharpened for one hour on a bloodrock whetstone has its threat range increased by one (after all other increases, including those gained from being keen or the Improved Critical feat) for one combat. A bloodrock whetstone can be used five times before it crumbles into useless dust.

Boomhammer

A boomhammer isn't strictly speaking an alchemical item, but it is designed to work with them. It is a masterwork warhammer with a notch in the striking head. The notch can be fit with any one of a number of alchemical materials (acid flask, alchemists fire, tanglefoot bag, thunderstone, flashpot, itching powder, or smoke bomb, as well as holy water). On a successful hit, the boomhammer also delivers the effect of the alchemical material loaded into it. Each alchemical material works only once, and reloading a boomhammer (so named because most are armed with thunderstones) is a full-round action.

Other bludgeoning or piercing melee weapons may be turned into boom-weapons (boomspear, boomstaff) at the GM's discretion. The cost is 450 gp, and includes the cost of making the item masterwork.

Caltrips

These wooden devices take the material used in a tanglefoot bag, and bind it instead into a series of small disks that remain stable unless broken (which normally happens when stepped on). One bag of caltrips covers a 5-foot square.

Each time a creature enters this square (or performs energetic activity within the square, such as fighting) the cantrips make an attack roll with a +0 attack bonus. This attack roll ignores armor, shield and deflection bonuses, though creatures without shoes or hard foot coverings gain a +2 bonus to their AC (as they are less likely to crush the caltrip disks). On a successful attack, the target is effected as if he'd been hit with a tanglefoot bag.

Darklight Candle

A darklight candle is made from the fat of creatures with natural abilities to create *darkness* (such as the darkmantle). It creates a strange, bluish-black illumination in a 60-foot radius. This has no effect on normal or low-light vision, but creatures with darkvision can see within this radius even if it is beyond their normal darkvision range. (Thus a dwarf looking at a darklight candle from 100 feet away can see things in its radius, even though his own darkvision goes only 60 feet.) A darklight candle burns for only 10 minutes.

Firevine Wine

Firevine wine is a fortified wine, created from extremely potent firevine fruit and including some of the same ingredients as alchemist's fire. A pint of firevine wine can be used for all the same purposed as oil. It can also be drunk, which gives the imbiber a +4 alchemical bonus to all Fort saves made to resist damage from a cold environment for six hours. However, imbibing a pint of the wine also requires a DC 13 Fort save, with failure dealing 1d6 Dex and Wis damage for 6 hours.

Flamerod

A flamerod is a three-foot long length of iron tube, packed with alchemical materials similar to those found in alchemist's fire, smokesticks and tindertwigs. A rawhide cord trails out the back end of the rod. When the cord is pulled, the rod shoots forth a 15-foot line of fire (a standard action). The line does 2d6 points of fire damage, with a DC 15 Reflex save for half damage. It also produces a cloud of smoke adjacent to the flamerod, identical to that produced by a smokestick. A flamerod can be reloaded once used, but this takes as long as costs as much as creating a new one.

Flashpot

A flashpot is a variant on alchemist's fire that creates a bright, sudden flash of light and fire along with a loud explosion. Any target within 30 feet is dazzled, and must make a DC 13 Fort save or be dazed for 1 round. You can throw a flashpot with a range increment of 10 feet.

Heating Pot

A heating pot includes a trailing cord connected to alchemical compounds sandwiched between two earthenware layers of a pot. When the cord is pulled the alchemcial compounds mix and heat, bringing the inner layer of the earthenware to a temperature just short of boiling. This is often used to provide a simple, hot meal or tea while adventuring in places where a fire is unadvisable (or impossible). Each heating pot works only once, staying warm for 1-4 hours. It is possible to build heating pots as canteens, and seal a liquid within them.

Itching Powder

Itching powder it a concoction of mildly poisonous herbs, dried and ground into powder with a few minerals and a bit of tar. This alchemical combination is normally stored in bags of waxed paper that burst apart when thrown (with a range increment of 10 feet). This creates a 5-foot diameter cloud of itching powder. Any creature with working, animal-based biology (excluding constructs, elementals, plants, oozes, and undead) within the radius must make a DC 15 Fort save. On a failed save, the target suffers terribly itching for 1d6 minutes. During this time the target takes a -2 penalty to all attack, damage, skill and ability checks.

Medicinals

Medicinals are herbs and other natural ingredients with healing properties that have been brought to peak potency within alchemical infusions, salves and foods. All medicinals have a shelf life of no more than three months -- after that they simply lack the power to do more than make a patient feel slightly better. Medicinals can be identified with a DC 20 heal check, or the traditional way with a Alchemistry Kit.

Brown Salve: A thick unguent made from plant sap and the ash of various plants. It grants a +5 alchemical bonus to any Heal check made to stabilize a target bleeding to death.

Eyebright: Eyebright is a tincture of plant essences designed to restore sight to damaged eyes. If a creature is blinded by spell or injury due to a failed saving throw and receives a dose of eyebright within 24 hours, he gains a second saving throw. If this second save is successful, eyesight is restored 2d12 hours later. On a failed save, the eyebright has no effect (and neither will future doses of the material).

Fevertea: A collection of herbs and honeys that is pressed into a small block for transportation, and mixed with boiling water to make an infusion before ingestion. If hot, fevertea gives any creature already suffering from a disease a +5 alchemical bonus to a Fort save (or to the Heal check of an attending caregiver) made to resist taking damage from the disease. A single dose of fevertea each day maintains this bonus. If fevertea is ingested when cold, it grants only a +2 bonus.

Health Soup: The alchemical version of the homemade remedy, this soup is actually able to protect from disease. Anyone eating it gains a +4 alchemical bonus to all saving throws against disease for 24 hours. Eating the soup takes 1 minute if it's hot, and 5 minutes (to choke down the congealed blobs of spiced grease) if it's cold. Health soup is often stored in heating pots (see below).

Red Salve: Made from a combination of oils and crushed herbs, red salve is a topical treatment for freeze damage. An application of red salve heals 1 hp of cold damage to a living creature. A character can only recover one hp of cold damage per day from red salve applications.

White Salve: Made from a combination of waxes and animal additives, white salve is a topical treatment for burns. An application of white salve heals 1 hp of acid or fire damage to a living creature. A character can only recover one hp of fire or acid damage per day from white salve applications.

Woundbind: Woundbind is a cloth bandage that has been soaked in healing herbs and alchemical materials. A target given a fresh woundbind on an injury gains a +1 alchemical bonus to the number of hit points recovered that day from natural healing. A successful Heal check (DC 15) increases this to a +2 alchemical bonus. A single woundbind grants its bonus only for one day.

Peaceweed

Peaceweed is a dried leaf that is designed to be loaded into a pipe and smoked. It produces mellow, soothing scents and actually reduces tensions in those who smell it. If a two or more creatures are smoking peaceweed, they gain a +4 alchemical bonus to all diplomacy checks made with one another. This has no effect on creatures nearby that aren't smoking peaceweed.

Preserved Leaches

Preserved leaches are actually dead, but have been mummified in such good condition they can still be used. When applied to a wound as a standard action, a preserved leach has enough chemical strength within it to suck any impurities out of the injury. This grants a +4 bonus to any Fort save required as the result of the wound (such as saves against disease and poisons). After working once, the leach bloats and becomes inert.

Shadow Oil

Shadow oil is pressed from the fat of creatures with natural abilities to hide in shadow, including those with natural abilities of *displacement*. The light produced by a lantern burning shadow oil is never brighter than shadowy illumination, but goes out to three times the lantern's normal range. This allows creatures with low-light vision to see normally, but places creatures with normal sight take the standard penalties for shadowy illumination.

Slowtinder

A bit of slowtinder appears to be a tindertwig and functions similarly. However, a piece of slowtinder struck against a hard surface only smolders for the next 2d6 rounds, not creating a flame until the end of that time.

Smoke Bomb

A smokebomb includes a bit of alchemist's fire, the materials from a smokestick, and powdered tinder that has been treated to burn quickly and produce a great deal of smoke. When broken open, the smoke bomb fills a twenty foot radius with thick, black smoke through which no vision is possible. Visibility through the smoke increases (from 0-feet) by five feet per round, until a creature can see through the cloud without obstruction eight rounds later. You can throw a smoke bomb with a range increment of 10 feet.

Travel-Loaf

Travel-loaf is a compact food made from candied fruits, grains, nuts, and heavy doses of thick, sweet saps. The result is a dark-tasting, sticky cross between bread and candy. While not particularly appetizing after a meal or two, the travel-loaf is filling enough that just a few bites keeps a man going for hours. As a result it is lighter than normal travel rations. It also has a shelf-life of three years, allowing groups carrying it to go great distances without buying fresh supplies.

Verminbane Pot

A verminbane pot contains a candle made from tallow and infused with plant extracts that produce scents vermin find distasteful. It takes a standard action to light a verminbane pot, which then affects an area twenty feet in radius. Vermin of 2 HD or less do not enter this area unless physically forced to, and are shaken if forced in. Vermin with more HD must make a DC 15 Fort save to enter the area, though they suffer no ill effects once they do so. A typical verminbane pot burns for 6 hours, though larger or smaller pots can be built.

Witchrod

A witchrod is a specially treated length of wood that reacts to spells that generate light. A light, or daylight spell cast on a witchrod has its duration multiplied by 6. Each time a witchrod is used, there's a 50% chance it burns out, making it inert after its current spell ends.

Wrestler's Grease

Wrestler's grease is a slick paste designed to be spread over the skin of an unarmed fighter. The grease lasts for 2d4 hours, during which time if the wrestler is wearing sparse clothing (no armor or anything more covering than a loincloth and boots) he gains a +6 alchemical bonus to all escape Artist checks. Additionally, the material warms the muscles and ligaments of the wrestler, allowing him to contort into positions normally beyond him, and move with lightning speed. This grants the wrestler a +2 alchemical bonus to Initiative checks and grapple checks for 1d4 hours.

More Questions than Answers

"Wilderness" Adventures

by Chris Aylott

I walked home from work Saturday night. That doesn't sound like much, but there's more to it than you might think.

It had been a bear of a day. Lots of browsers, not quite enough buyers, and more than a few examples of why some gamers should not be allowed to breed. I was also foolish enough to play "Shift the Sections," an entertaining little puzzle game that never takes less than four hours to complete.

So it was that around 11:20 p.m., I had the picture books where the cookbooks used to be, the cookbooks where the mysteries used to be, and the science and history sections entangled in a frenzied mating dance. The buses had stopped running hours before and the car was at home with the sleeping wife and baby, so I called a cab. An hour later, I called another cab company, was told I'd be waiting another hour, and said, "Screw it. I can walk the six miles in the time it'll take them to get me home."

Such is the on-the-edge life of a small-town retailer.

I haven't walked home in about five years. We used to live about three miles away from the store, and I'd walk home every so often when my wife wasn't around and the weather was good. It was 45 minutes down a familiar road, nothing special. Then we moved, and the distance doubled, and home got just far enough away to be inconvenient. I knew I could do the walk if I had to, but I wouldn't unless I really wanted to.

Saturday night I felt angry and put-upon enough to really want to. So there I was, walking down Route 10 a little bit before one on a Sunday morning. Ninety minutes door-to-door, no people on the street, no phone, no radio, nothing but me and my thoughts.

Lungfish Between the Ponds

We spend most of our time swimming in information and human contact. We're used to being able to reach out and touch each other, to be able to watch live TV from Los Angeles or trade instant message knock-knock jokes with a friend in Tokyo. There's always somebody to talk to even when you're home alone, and you can learn anything if you know the right search terms.

We spend so much time in the infosphere that it's easy to forget that it's more like an a series of interconnected ponds than an ocean. It's easy to walk away from our computers and phones, but we don't do it very often. When we do, it's to spend time in a public place, surrounded by people. We do not go to the woods often, and when we do it's usually in pairs and packs.

When is the last time you were alone, and for how long? When was the last time you spent more than a few minutes walking without conversation or music or even a book to distract you?

I said above that I walked home with nothing but myself and my thoughts, but that's not true. Myself and my thoughts were surrounded by everything else, and that can be a little bit scary.

Alone in the Night

I'm not a fearful person. I've walked through bad neighborhoods, chased shoplifters, and dealt with crazy people in the store. I get wary around a potentially threatening person, but the increased alertness is mental and not physical. I can

feel my mind speeding up to take in more information, but my body stays calm. A person is a finite and obvious threat, something that can be evaluated and dealt with.

Walking down a dark road is different. I could feel my muscles tensing up. My eyes were darting around, and I was trying to listen to everything around me. Maybe my body was trying to compensate for the relative lack of information around me, going into overdrive and bringing everything it could to my wary mind.

It's not like there's much that could be dangerous on the road with me. Passing cars, sure, but the road shoulder is wide and I saw the traffic long before it got to me. There are bears in our valley this summer, but there wasn't much chance of one crossing my path. The only thing I really have to worry about was skunks. I smelled a couple and saw one, a big fat white skunk with a black belly, easy to spot as he inspected somebody's garbage 50 feet off the road. Not exactly a big moment in the annals of Man vs. Nature.

As I walked, I began to think I heard movement on the other side of the road. It was an almost-sound, a whispering a few feet away and just a little bit behind. Rational thought told me it was simply the echo of my footsteps off the trees, but my mind kept riffling through possibilities, trying out imagined threats and always coming up empty. I didn't feel in control of the situation; it seemed impossible that that my ears were picking up this small noise of my own footsteps reflected back at me.

Then I passed a house on the other side of the street, and the dog there took exception to me. It had one of those deep, angry barks that you associate with German Shepherds and Dobermans, and I froze. He had to be tied up or behind a fence, right? What if he were roaming around free? I couldn't run if he were after me; would I even be able to see well enough to defend myself? The bark scared me, scared me in a way that people don't.

Am I afraid because I live a sheltered existence of light, of humming computers and familiar spaces? If I were a farmer living in this valley a century ago, would I walk by the dog with a shrug, muttering "Ain't nothing but old Kasha . . ."? Am I nervous because I'm not trained to live in the natural world, or is there still a bit of caveman in me that fears the darkness outside of the firelight?

Death and the Player Character

About halfway home, I heard a cat die. There was a rising scream, just like a fight was starting . . . and then it was cut off. There are fisher cats and coyotes in the woods around our town; that noise was easy to figure out.

But I stood there and felt my heart pounding in its chest, felt my arms and legs tensed up and ready to fight or flight. I stood there for maybe 10, 15 seconds, waiting for an attack that wasn't going to happen. And I felt sorry for the cat, because I like cats -- but a little part of me was busy being glad it was the cat and not me.

What frightened me most is how little control I had over my reaction. One noise triggered a whole chain of events in my body, and my conscious mind had no say in the process. Is this something I could learn to control if I spent more time outdoors, heard more animals die in the night? Or is it that caveman wiring again, an instinct that will inevitably take over? Is my rational mind really in charge, or is it just along for the ride?

Once my body was convinced I was safe, I turned back to the road and plodded the rest of the way home. One foot in front of the other, no choice but to keep going because there was nowhere else to go. Most of my walks are a few blocks at most, wandering through the neighborhoods where I live or work, never more than five minutes away from where I started. Walking point-to-point is different from walking around; it's more of a burden to know that if you get tired or footsore you have to keep going.

As I walked, it occurred to me that the RPG characters we play do this all the time. We roam the wilderness of a campaign world from our kitchen tables, and most of the time a walk in the woods is condensed into a few words and a random encounter with bandits.

I don't want to make too much of this, since I'm all too aware that most RPGs are about one set of numbers killing

another set of numbers and taking its stuff. But most gamers at least take a stab at putting themselves in the minds of their characters, and I have to wonder -- are we missing something fundamental when we do?

What does it feel like to walk through the woods at night when you know there really are monsters in the dark? When the nearest house is miles away instead of a few feet, and there are no streetlamps and pavement to guide you? How does Grok the Barbarian read the little signs and sounds of the night around him, and what does he feel when he ears a dire wolf howl at the moon?

And what about facing the unknown? Your typical fantasy adventurer may be competent and comfortable in his work environment, but does that make it any easier to poke through a dark corridor and wait for something to jump into the radius of your torchlight?

We sit in our living rooms and stare at our computers and enjoy the fantasy of power that comes from magic items and martial arts. But I wonder how much the experience of playing our characters is diminished by spending our own lives indoors. How can we walk a day's march in their woods when we so rarely walk through our own?

"He who sits still in a house all the time may be the greatest vagrant of all . . ."

- Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"

On Inns, Taverns, and Alehouses

by S. E. Mortimer

Introduction

In a typical fantasy or medieval roleplaying campaign, the building most frequently visited by characters is the local inn or tavern. Considering that a majority of sessions involves at least some time being spent here it is surprising how little is actually known by GMs about the operation of such an enterprise. In a typical game, the PCs might enter the "common room," find a table and sit down (presumably on chairs or stools), hassle the bartender or serving wench for a meal and some ale or wine, while looking suspiciously at the stranger sitting in the dark corner. They assume that every alehouse also has rooms for rent so after a heavy session of drinking they head upstairs to sleep (all establishments have at least two storeys) -- everyone in a separate room or at least in a separate bed. Unfortunately, in medieval society, the above scenario is unlikely to have actually happened in the vast majority of cases.

The Alehouse

Initially the alehouse was a private abode and the industry was conducted almost entirely by women. Anyone with a cauldron and some spare cash to buy grain would make a batch of ale, set out a sign (an "ale-stake"), and sell their produce in their yard to all comers. After the day's work, people would gather at this premises, drink up the batch of ale, which might last one or two days, and then move on to the next alehouse. Even in a small village there were usually several houses selling ale at any one time.

As with all skills, some people were better at brewing than others. Those women who had an aptitude for brewing might make a full-time occupation from it. Their homes became permanent breweries and larger villages might have several permanent alehouses. In England in the 7th century, King Ethelbert of Kent restricted the number of brewers (called "brewsters") in each village, suggesting that the occupation was quite common even at this early date. In the 10th century King Edgar regulated the size of drinking vessels, implying that ale was being sold at specific locations by this time. Ales were sometimes brewed for Church holidays or to raise funds. These batches were known as "scot ales" and those who brewed secretly to avoid giving the Church its due were said to be drinking "scot free."

Ale was an essential part of the diet, containing loads of carbohydrates as well as vitamins and proteins that were not present in other foods. Ale was also fairly expensive -- a gallon cost about one day's wages for an unskilled labourer. Even at this price, the profits from such an enterprise were slim, but it was one of the few ways a woman could earn hard currency. Unlike most industries, the aristocracy didn't control the brewing industry with monopolies, but it exacted fines from people found guilty of using faulty measures, selling weak ale, or selling at too high a price. Only the very poor drank water, which was of dubious quality, and best avoided where possible.

Adventurers wandering into a small village would be unlikely to find an inn or a tavern. They would need to discover the location of the current alehouse. A polite conversation with anyone they come across will point them in the right direction. The alehouse will have an ale-stake in front of the house and, if the time is late afternoon, is likely to have a crowd of noisy drinkers milling around -- including men, women, and children. The PCs will be viewed suspiciously

Drinking Vessels

Drinking vessels were usually large and communal. Rarely would someone have his own drinking cup. They were made from pottery, pewter, wood, or leather. Often, each measure was marked by a peg and it was custom to drink only down to the next peg and then pass the vessel on. Some people drank beyond their allotted measure and the next drinker was said to be "taken down a peg or two" -- an expression still used today.

A vessel called a "jack" was an English innovation. It was made of leather and waterproofed with pitch or beeswax. On the continent it was considered uncivilised to drink from leather. It was joked that the English "drank from their boots."

since all "foreigners" (anyone not of this village) are considered to be untrustworthy. If the PCs buy a round or two for everyone then they will be received more warmly. Long boards set upon collapsible trestles (or tree stumps, old barrels, etc.) constitute tables and chairs. The table was simply called a "board" and the bench was called a "form." Food might be available for purchase (maybe a simple stew and some bread) and anyone who wanted to spend the night was welcome to pay a farthing or two and sleep on a straw-covered pallet on the floor near the fire. In a typical village this was the only accommodation available unless the party was invited by the local lord to dine at his manor, or a monastery was nearby (see "The Inn," below).

On a normal day, a person would drink around a quart of ale -- even children. Water was only drunk when ale was unavailable or unaffordable. If there was a celebration, the PCs can expect to drink a gallon or more. The alcohol content of ale was lower than in today's beverages but the large quantities consumed ensured that people still became intoxicated. See pp. B439-440 for more on Drinking and Intoxication. Treat a quart of cheap ale as one "drink." Later in the evening, as folks became more drunk, arguments and scuffles were common, and there are numerous accounts of people injuring or even killing themselves in accidents on their way home after a drinking session.

The Tavern

The tavern was the predecessor of the modern restaurant where food and alcohol were served for consumption on the premises. Villages very rarely had a tavern; they were only established in larger towns and cities -- particularly ones which had a fairly large population of professional classes, including lawyers, bankers, merchants, and public servants. Unlike early alehouses and inns, taverns were purely places of leisure from when they were first established in the Middle Ages. They rarely offered accommodation and only some sold meals. The range of beverages in the towns was larger than in villages. Ale, wine, mead, cider, and (later) beer and spirits (brandy, gin, rum, etc.), were all available. By the 16th century, the custom of "dining out" was well established, and good meals could be had for reasonable prices in many taverns. Taverns were also places of entertainment, offering music, singing, dancing, and gaming.

Vices: A trade closely associated with taverns is prostitution. Apart from the regular girls and serving wenches, when there was an influx of travelers into the town -- such as annual fairs -- many other women, including laundresses, tradeswomen, and servants found it to be a profitable sideline. With no laws against child slavery, prostitutes started young. Taverns also promoted gambling -- dice games were common and the low light in taverns facilitated trickery by "sharpers." For more about dice games see the article "[Gambling & Dice Games](#)."

Adventurers entering a town will have no trouble locating a tavern since most will be located on the main road and along the docks. The noise will be audible for some distance. Some taverns will have a street-side counter selling "fast food" and drink to passers-by. Inside they will find alcohol, entertainment, and many will offer meals. There will be loud music, noisy patrons and dim, smoky rooms lit by tallow candles and grease lamps (see [Lighting the Way](#)"). They will find both games of chance and games of skill including dicing, board and card games, knife throwing, archery competitions, and bowling -- both of the latter were done outside in the alley between buildings. What they will not find in a tavern is accommodation (though temporary beds might be available for prostitutes), so they will need to make other arrangements if they need lodging for the night.

The Inn

In Europe during the early Middle Ages there were very few inns. Travelers found accommodation and sustenance in monasteries, as well as refuge from

The Wine Crier

In larger cities, especially in France, there was a man called the "wine crier." Each morning he went to the first tavern he could find that didn't already have a crier. The tavern keeper was legally obliged to accept him since he also acted as a government inspector. The wine crier oversaw the drawing of the wine, or drew it himself, and tasted it. If it was acceptable, he inquired as to what the prices were, filled up a flagon, grabbed a cup, and went out into the street to accost the public -- offering samples in an attempt to get people to patronize the tavern.

the numerous wayfarers, brigands, and political malcontents on the treacherous roads. These monasteries gave away their hospitality for free, but wealthier travelers were expected to give generous donations. Increase in trade and pilgrimages put a tremendous strain on the resources of the monasteries and so "lodging houses," or inns, were conceived and established by monasteries, guilds, and private entrepreneurs. Church owned inns were also used to house craftsmen who were labouring on Church construction projects. Laws were imposed to compel innkeepers to accept all travelers providing they were in "reasonable condition" and willing to pay for food, drink and lodging. In some countries, selected inns were required to maintain stables and set aside rooms for official business. Some innkeepers acted as unofficial postmasters and kept spare horses for royal couriers.

An inn provided drink, meals, and beds. Many inns also incorporated a tavern, which provided entertainment (see "Taverns," above). Usually it was the tavern that earned the innkeeper most of his income. The types of drink depended on the location of the inn. In remote locations, the innkeeper could only sell what he and his wife, or the local villagers, could brew. In towns and cities, greater variety was available. Usually one would order a drink for the table and receive an earthenware pitcher and a large communal mug (see "Drinking Vessels" textbox, above). Establishments that catered to upper class clientele might provide a separate cup or tankard for each customer. Over time this became more common.

The type of food available depended upon the season and the quality of the establishment. Inns that catered to higher classes usually had a greater selection of meals and better quality food. Meals were served on long tablecloth-covered boards mounted on wooden trestles. Seating benches were mounted on lower trestles. The phrase "bed and board" originally referred to the board upon which meals were served. Serving dishes were set in the middle of the table and diners ate whatever was closest to them. Sometimes grabbing things with their hands and sometimes using a large spoon. They dished their food onto "trenchers" -- thick slices of coarse stale bread that acted as plates (the word comes from the French, *trancher*, "to slice"). After the meal, the grease and sauce-soaked trencher could be eaten. Wealthier diners rarely ate the trencher, but gave it away to the poor. In the 14th century trenchers started to be served on thin wooden or pewter plaques, and by the 16th century these underplaques replaced trenchers altogether to become dinner plates.

Sleeping quarters were also different to what one might expect today. It was not uncommon for two or three travelers to share a single bed -- even complete strangers. Though men and women slept separately (unless married). Multiple people in one bed was a sensible way to deal with cold winters and limited space. Almost all rooms had multiple beds. If there were no vacancies left and a wealthy patron required a bed, many innkeepers would think nothing of waking one of the lower class customers and tossing them out in the street. More generous hosts might let them spend the rest of the night on the floor in the kitchen or out in the stable. Most mattresses were stuffed with straw but inns catering to wealthy clientele might have a few beds with mattresses stuffed with animal hair or even feathers. Even in the best rooms one rarely slept alone -- besides the main bed, there would be pallets on the floor for servants and guards.

The Innkeeper

A good living could be had if the inn was located in a prosperous village or town and well situated on the main road. If

Fermenters of Dissent

Alehouses, taverns, and inns were "melting pots" where people of disparate status mixed. The alcohol drunk in these establishments brought the high born and the low together. However, they also served as a place where the commoners could gather without their "betters." Because of this, the upper classes feared them. Drinking houses served as meeting places where rebellion and dissent might fester. Local authorities mounted regular raids and searches for brigands and vagabonds just to demonstrate who was in charge. The Church feared these houses because they provided an alternative meeting place besides the parish church. This diminished the authority and control of organised religion. These drinking houses served as the natural location for revelling, mumming, feasting, common law unions, dowry negotiations, betrothal and wedding celebrations, and christenings. Some say that they provided an alternative religion - "drink," not "worship." The Church criticized them with the full support of the state because they promoted "sin" -- excessive drinking, prostitution, gambling, riot, and sedition.

it was less happily situated, the innkeeper's lot was a harder one. He had to work day and night and could not afford to turn anyone away no matter how late the hour. Life was a continual struggle to meet overheads and taxes, which usually included rent to the landowner -- his feudal lord or the church. The innkeeper wasn't just an efficient caterer, he needed to be a diplomat, conversationist, and business manager. Innkeepers acted as information centres and mediators. They provided entertainment, stables, and medical services. They arranged credit for customers and acted as pawn brokers. In isolated locations an inn might also serve as a general store. Useful skills could include Accounting, Area Knowledge, Brawling, Cooking, Current Affairs, Diplomacy, First Aid, Gambling, Games, Housekeeping, Merchant, Professional skill: Bartender, and Streetwise.

Types of Alcohol

The most commonly drunk beverage depended upon the region and what produce was locally available. Scandinavians and Celts drank mead, the Normans liked cider, the English preferred ale and the Flemish, beer. The Germans drank "aromatic wine," the French preferred white wine, the Burgundians preferred red. In France there were over 50 vintages in the 13th century; the most highly regarded was labelled "Pierrefitte." Distilled wine spirits (brandy) was known to the Greeks and Romans and used as an antiseptic and as a primitive anaesthetic. It doesn't seem to have been drunk in Europe in the Middle Ages until the 13th century in Spain and Italy, and 14th century in France and England.

Prices

Lodging	cost/head	Notes
Monastery	variable*	Obligated to make a donation
Alehouse	\$2*	Pallet on floor near fire
Inn -- cheap	\$1	3 people per bed, or pallet on floor
Inn -- fair	\$2	2 people per bed
Inn -- good	\$5	separate bedding (shared room)
Inn -- fine	\$10	separate room (small)
Inn -- suite	\$30	1 large room & 1 smaller room

* includes breakfast -- usually a pint of ale with some bread and stew.

For the cost of stabling a mount see "[Horse Sense](#)."

Meals*	cost	Notes
Meal, cheap	\$1	stew
Meal, good	\$2	fresh bread (coarse), salted meat & stew
Meal, fine	\$5	fresh bread (fine), roasted meat & stew, dessert
Meal, v.fine	\$20	multiple courses, varied cuisine

* all meals included a thick "trencher" of stale bread to act as a plate

For the cost of travel rations see "[Rationalizing Rations](#)."

Drink (1 gallon)	weight	cost	alcohol*	Notes
Ale, cheap	8 lbs	\$3	4 drinks	sours after 2 days
Ale, good	8 lbs	\$4	6 drinks	sours after 3 days
Ale, fine	8 lbs	\$6	8 drinks	sours after 3 days
Beer	8 lbs	\$4	6 drinks	available after 15th C.
Wine, cheap	8 lbs	\$2	4 drinks	very sour
Wine, good	8 lbs	\$4	8 drinks	
Wine, fine	8 lbs	\$8 1	2 drinks	
Cider	8 lbs	\$4	6 drinks	

Mead	8 lbs	\$8	8 drinks	
Spirits	7.5 lbs	\$500	6 4 drinks	1 drink (1/4 pint) costs \$8

*Alcohol -- the number of "drinks" per gallon (see pp.B439-440). E.g. 1 gallon of fine ale contains 8 drinks.

Notes

- Unlike most beverages, ale had some nutritional value and formed an important part of the diet.
- The above prices and alcohol content of wine reflects the fact that it was watered down before drinking.
- The above prices are only for drinks that are produced *locally*. Imported products cost at least *double* the listed value (e.g. England had few local vintages, most wine was imported).

Hank Dasher, Ace Reporter

for *GURPS*

by Mark Gellis

It does not surprise anyone that Henry "Hank" Dasher was born in 1901, at the dawn of the new century. There is not a hint of the Victorian in him; everything about him speaks of the age of the automobile and the American city.

Hank grew up in a small town in upstate New York. His father was a carpenter and his mother worked at home, raising Hank and his three sisters. As a boy, he loved to read, especially newspapers. One of his favorite memories from his boyhood is sitting on the porch with his father on an early autumn evening, talking about the 1908 Presidential campaign. His father had been reading newspaper articles to him and explaining why he thought Mr. Taft might make a good President. As he grew older, Hank dreamed of meeting famous people and traveling to foreign countries.

He had an uncle who worked in the Brooklyn shipyards. Two or three times when he was growing up, his father took the family down for a visit; they would always spend a day in the city, seeing the sights and then catching a baseball game (Hank was about 13 when the Highlanders started calling themselves the Yankees). Between the elevated trains and the brand new subway system, getting around New York was surprisingly easy. Hank never got tired of looking at the skyscrapers, wondering if he would ever end up in one of those buildings, looking out on New York from the 10th or 15th floor, hammering out his stories on a typewriter, a famous big city reporter for a big city newspaper.

He was thinking about being a reporter when he got out of high school, and had written a few short pieces for the local newspaper, but when America declared war on Germany in 1917, Hank enlisted in the Navy. He served for two years on one of the many "thousand tonner" destroyers, but decided against making a career out of the Navy.

And so, at 19, he found himself living in a New York City boarding house. He knew he could always go home and work with his father as a carpenter, but he still had the dream of being a big city newspaper man. He knew that with virtually no experience it would be hard to convince an editor to give him a chance, and so he wrote a few short sample pieces about Navy life, including a gripping account of an encounter between the destroyer on which he had served and a German U-boat. He splurged on a new suit and a new hat and started making the rounds of the New York daily papers.

To his surprise, Hank got a job at the second paper he visited. Later on, he realized he had done exactly the right thing to get an editor interested in hiring him. He had talent. He wrote quickly in a clear and straightforward style that had flair without being bloated with what his editor called "bad poetry." But what had really clinched the job for him was the way he handled himself. He had impressed people with his professionalism. He was honest about his experience, ready to work hard, and he had thought through what he needed to do to show an editor what he could offer. At 19, of course, he was still pretty raw, but he already had what he needed to become a success -- talent, intelligence, and drive -- and it did not take him very long to learn the newspaper business.

Hank soon found that being a reporter often meant long hours and dealing with the stress of deadlines. But he thrived on it. He did not mind working long hours; as a teenager, he had helped his father on a number of carpentry jobs. "No shame in hard work, as long as it's honest work," his father had always told him.

Besides, being a reporter meant something. It was not just getting the story out, but making sure that he got the facts straight, that he was serving not only his editor but the public.

Hank understands that a newspaper is a business, and that many good stories will end up buried on page nineteen for one reason or another, but he believes that telling the truth about what happens in the world matters and he knows that every once in a while a good news story can make a big difference.

And, on top of it, it is interesting work. Over the years, he has covered everything from political scandals to gang wars to the Scopes Monkey Trial, not to mention the occasional curious disappearance of some scholar last seen in one of the ancient, crumbling villages dotting the odd corners of New England. He has learned things about the powerful, the wealthy, and the famous, and about the way the world works, that he would never have known otherwise. And he is not just learning history after the fact; he gets to see it all happen and he gets to be the one to tell the rest of the world about it.

By the late 1920s, and afterwards, Hank is a respected member of the New York journalistic community. People around the country and especially in New York who are familiar with his work admire his talent as a writer and his integrity as a journalist. Even more important to Hank, his parents and his sisters are proud of him.

Hank is a man with a very modern code of honor. He is aggressive, sometimes blunt, but it is because he cares about the truth. He does mind if someone tells little white lies to avoid hurting people, but he hates it if people lie about something important when their only reason for doing so is that the truth might be ugly or uncomfortable. He holds himself to high standards. When his name goes on a story, he wants the facts to be right. If he makes a mistake and the story gets into print, it infuriates him. And if someone lies to him and it ruins a story, Hank makes it his business to find out what that person was lying about.

Naturally, success has not come without its challenges. For Hank, one of these challenges is a man named Charlie Paxton. Paxton writes for another New York newspaper, and he is a very good reporter, but he is also a man plagued by jealousy. Paxton sees Hank as someone who always manages to make his victories seem a little smaller. In addition, Hank thinks too much about how the news is important to society, about how a story can make a difference, and that just rubs Paxton the wrong way. If a story is important, it is going to come out eventually; what matters is who can get it to their editor first. So Charlie Paxton prides himself on being able to get his news stories in before Hank Dasher does and, every once in a while -- if he can manage it without getting caught -- on keeping Hank from getting his story in at all. Hank will not swear that Paxton is responsible for some sources changing their minds at the last moment about talking to him, because he does not have any proof, but he certainly has his suspicions.

Hank currently lives in a small but pleasant Manhattan apartment. His landlady likes him, but wishes he would find a nice gal and settle down. Hank would not mind getting married, and hopes to do so someday, but he enjoys the freedom of being a bachelor. He also likes dogs, but he does not have any pets -- he is gone most of the day and he does not think it is fair to an animal to keep it locked up all alone in an apartment all day long. There are some days when he gets a little lonely, but for the most part he thinks he has things pretty good. After all, he loves his work, people like him, and he is living in the greatest city in the world. Any night of the week, he can choose from any of a dozen terrific plays on Broadway (he still remembers the first time he got to see Bela Lugosi play Dracula on stage). And for the price of a ticket and a subway ride, he can spend a summer afternoon watching the best baseball team in America. Life is good.

Using Hank Dasher In A Campaign

Hank Dasher can be used in a campaign in a number of ways.

First, Hank is suitable as a 150-point player character, either as is or with minor changes. (Most likely, if Hank is a player character, it means he is between jobs for some reason.) While he is not oriented towards combat, he is not incompetent in a fight and he does provide any group of player characters with a member who has numerous investigative skills.

Second, Hank would make a useful contact or ally. He knows the city, he knows the people, and he knows the history. He can be used to provide characters with critical clues or access to the newspaper's "morgue" if they need to do their own research.

Third, Hank would make a useful "enemy." He believes people have a right to know what is going on in the world. Naturally, if something is a private matter, such as a city official who has cancer but who can still do his job and who wants to keep his personal affairs out of the public eye, Hank has no problem keeping a secret, and this is a quality

that has earned him more than one friend over the years. And if publishing a story was going to put a government agent at risk or compromise an important operation, he would cooperate. Of course, because of his sometimes blunt manner, people may not realize at first that Hank Dasher will respect certain secrets. A GM should feel free to use this to provoke anxiety in both players and player characters.

And anyone with a real secret is going to find Hank Dasher a serious nuisance. He has little interest in suppressing a story just to save someone who has done something wrong from being embarrassed (and maybe fired from his job or arrested or voted out of office). And the idea that he should not tell the public about sinister cults, ancient monsters, or flying saucers because it might cause a panic is, to him, ludicrous. If something is that dangerous, people need to know about it, even if it might be the end of the world. Hank thinks most people would rather know that it is coming so they can face it in their own way. If his editor makes the decision to pull a story, Hank can live with that, but he certainly will not be happy about it.

An even worse nuisance, however, could be Charlie Paxton. Paxton has all of Hank's skills as a reporter, but he is more self-serving when it comes to ferreting out secrets that other people want to keep hidden. He has never actually stooped to blackmail, but there is always a first time for everything, especially if the secret was something that was not really newsworthy and the payment was in something other than cash, like sleeping with him or giving away another person's secrets. In addition, while Hank is direct, Charlie is very smooth; he is a handsome and charismatic fellow, a fast talker and a good liar. And while he is not going to do anything like shoot someone for not talking to him, he does not really care who gets hurt when the truth comes out as long as he gets his story in.

One possible adventure seed would be that Hank might contact the player characters if one of his stories got suppressed. This could have happened because Hank stumbled onto something fantastic, like a magician who could raise the dead and make them serve him as slaves, but he did not have enough proof to get the story published. Hank might figure that the best way to get the story out is to get other people involved, people who might be able to gather proof that cannot be ignored. In return for his information, Hank wants to be the one to break the story when the player characters finish the adventure, get exclusive interviews with the heroes who saved the city from the walking dead, and so on.

Another option would be if someone was threatening Hank's family, who still live in upstate New York. Whatever gangsters, cultists, or corrupt politicians Hank happens to be investigating want him to stop, and they have made it clear they are willing to hurt his loved ones if he does not. Hank's parents and sisters do not enter into his daily life often enough to count as Dependents, but naturally he still loves them and would be concerned if they were in danger (one may treat this as a 0-point feature of being a Normal Person). Concerned that the police will be unable protect his family, Hank may turn to the player characters to guard his loved ones and to help him find the truth about the people he is investigating.

Hank Dasher was designed for a game set during the Cliffhangers era, World War II, or the Atomic Horror era. By World War II or the 1950s, of course, he may no longer be a reporter but an editor, serving as a patron (or at least a boss) for a group of investigative journalist player characters. To use Hank in this role, assume he has 25 extra points (or more) to spend on additional or improved skills and contacts.

Modifying Hank Dasher for other historical periods should be fairly easy, as it will involve little more than changing a few particulars in his biography and some of his skills; Typing, for example, would most likely be replaced with Computer Operation if Hank was used in a campaign set in the present.

In the same way, making Hank Dasher a reporter for a Chicago or San Francisco paper instead of a New York one would most likely be a simple matter of modifying a few of his skills, such as Area Knowledge, some of his contacts, and one of his quirks.

If the campaign requires that Hank be a reporter for a European newspaper, one can assume he stayed in Europe (most likely England, although Ireland and Scotland are also possibilities) after the War. If this is the case, Hank provides an excellent opportunity for some humorous roleplaying, as it will be fairly easy to juxtapose his straightforward personality with more genteel (or perhaps just stuffy) European ones.

Hank Dasher In *GURPS*

5'9" 150 lbs. Black hair. Blue eyes. An American reporter, probably in his late 20s to his early 40s, depending on the date of the campaign, usually wearing a nice suit and a hat.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 10 [0]

BL 20 [0]; **HP** 10 [0]; **Will** 13 [0]; **Per** 13 [0]; **FP** 10 [0]; **Basic Move** 5.25 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]; French (broken) [2]

Advantages: Charisma 1 [5]; Contact group (An NYPD detective, an assistant District Attorney, an assistant to a state senator in the New York legislature, and a staff member of a Congressman; treat all four as Skill 15-, Available on 12-, and Usually reliable) [32]; Press Pass [1]; Reputation 1 (Smart, tough, and fair reporter, Recognized both by newspaper readers and people he has worked with, Sometimes recognized) [1]

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Journalist -- Be fair and accurate; do not give up until the truth is discovered and made public; do not let a good story get buried unless there is a very good reason for it, etc.) [-5]; Enemy (Charlie Paxton, As powerful, Rival, 9-) [-5]

Quirks: Aggressive when investigating a tough story [-1]; Enjoys Broadway, baseball games, and other perks of living in New York City [-1]; Likes dogs [-1]; Likes the way he looks in a good suit (but nothing too fancy) [-1]; Straightforward and honest [-1]

Skills:

Administration-12 [1]
Area Knowledge (New York City)-14 [2]
Area Knowledge (New York State)-13 [1]
Carpentry-13 [1]
Crewman (Seamanship)-13 [1]
Criminology-11 [1]
Current Affairs (New York City)-15 [4]
Detect Lies-13 [4]
Driving (Automobile)-11 [2]
First Aid-13 [1]
Guns (Pistol)-11 [1]
Guns (Rifle)-11 [1]
History (New York City)-12 [2]; Literature-11 [1]
Observation-13 [2]
Photography-13 [2]
Propaganda-12 [1]
Research-14 [4]
Shadowing-12 [1]
Streetwise-12 [1]
Typing-12 [2]
Writing-15 [8]

Press Pass

A press pass can be treated as a one-point perk. It does not confer Legal Enforcement Powers of any kind. It does not mean your employer is a Patron who will bail you out of trouble. It does not include Contacts. Advantages such as these must be purchased separately. However, a press pass (or similar credentials that prove your connection to a recognized news agency) may make it easier for you to gain access to people, places, and information; among other things, some people (police, politicians, etc.) may be more willing to answer certain questions due to the fact that you are a representative of the media establishment.

Total Points: 150

* * *

*Thanks to David Stroup and others on **Pyramid** for information they provided about press passes and the daily lives of journalists.*

We Refuse to Prove We Exist, Say the Gods

Clerics and Theology for the *d20 System*

by Jonathan Willis

In a typical *d20 System* game world, the gods exist.

A fairly obvious statement one might think. The stock fantasy world has very active deities, with legions of clerics and supernatural entities at their beck and call. In the face of such blatant evidence, the existence of any god supported by clerics must be considered beyond doubt. Furthermore, anyone claiming the existence of a god that doesn't have any clerics will face much skepticism. If a question of doctrine comes up, clerics can figure it out based on what behavior cause them to lose their spells, or use *commune* to ask the deity directly. The gods are as much a part of the everyday world as the landscape or the weather. This form of religious background is derived from the mythology of ancient polytheistic cultures, such as the Greeks or Norse, and suits the high-fantasy style that the *d20 System* does well.

However, active deities don't suit every setting or campaign style. What if you want to play a gritty low-magic setting? Or are adapting an existing fantasy world that doesn't have proven deities? Or perhaps play a psuedo-historical campaign, using a real historic period but assuming the existence of (arcane) magic? The default *d20 System* rules make certain setting assumptions that make it difficult to play these sorts of campaigns. The assumption of active deities is built right into the character creation system, with four of the core classes (Cleric, Druid, Paladin, and Ranger) casting divine spells. Simply by existing, these spells are strong evidence for the truth of the casters beliefs.

Truth, Evidence, and Society

So, do the deities actually exist? This should of course be up the GM or world-builder, and it would be desirable for them to be able to say "answer hazy, ask again later." The inhabitants of a fantasy world probably won't know The Truth, so why should the players have better information? Assuming a standard *d20 System* setup (i.e. prevalent and reliable magic users of various types), what the inhabitants of the world -- and by extension the players -- would know is what they can observe of how magic works, and what they can reason out from these observations. Some things people could look at in explaining the supernatural include:

- **Who can cast spells?** If anybody who becomes an ordained priest of Thoth suddenly gains the ability to cast spells, this seems pretty solid evidence that Thoth exists. On the other hand, perhaps even the most devout atheist can learn healing spells after a few years in magic school. Or maybe some people gain spells by being a priest, some by book learning.
- **What actions, if any, cause magic users to lose their spells?** If priests of Thoth lose their spells if they wear red, this suggests Thoth doesn't like people wearing red. Again, this need not be the same for everybody; inconsistent rules would be a nightmare for scholars trying to create ethical systems based on a religion.
- **How do people cast spells?** A wizard who casts lightning by calling on Zeus to smite his enemies seems more religious than a cleric who mutters in some lost language. Maybe some wizards call on Zeus while others chant in ancient Aramaic.
- **Are there any visual or sensory themes for spell effects?** If everybody who gets healed feels God's peace in their soul, or if a lightning bolt leaves the after-image of an avenging angel, this suggests these abilities are divine. If some spells have such divine motifs then, any that don't may be assumed to not be divine by default.
- **Do any creatures exist that claim to be servants (or enemies) of a deity?** If so, how credible is this claim? The more powerful and mysterious the creature is, the more likely it is to be believed.

If the campaign is going to include ambiguity about deities and the supernatural, the main thing the GM needs to decide is, "What does each society believe to be true, and what evidence do they use (or ignore) to justify these beliefs?" It's possible, and often quite interesting, to create complicated and/or ambiguous evidence which can have

many different possible interpretations. Scholars can spend years arguing solutions to these questions, while kings and self-proclaimed prophets will bring their own interpretations to the masses for political gain; whether these interpretations are logically consistent is a side issue. Two different groups could observe the same evidence and come to different, even conflicting conclusions.

So the GM is now free to decide how the societies of their campaign world treat divine and arcane magics. Do everyday people even distinguish between divine and arcane magics? This will be influenced how common both types are. In a typical **d20 System** fantasy setting (with magic available for purchase in every town) people will probably be at least vaguely aware there are two or more styles of magic-user with different spells. Are either type of magic consider to be of divine origin? Even if the gods don't raise their hands and announce they exist, some magic users (traditionally clerics and paladins, but potentially any spellcaster) may be thought to be servants of a god or gods. Of course different individuals, organizations, and societies may have very different views on this subject, but without the direct intervention of the god themselves there is no certainty.

Rules and Crunch

While **d20 System** does implicitly assume known deities, the question of whether or not divine spells and abilities are in fact god-given has very limited effect on the rules:

- The Aura associated with paladins and certain clerics (see pg. 32 of the PHB) can be either ignored, or applied to any spellcasters whose abilities are actually of good/evil origin, If users of *detect evil* spells are credible this provides strong evidence some types of magic are inherently good or evil.
- Behavioral restrictions on divine spellcasters can be ignored, explained as arcane mysticism rather than divine instruction, or be considered psychosomatic.
- The restriction on paladin multiclassing can be ignored.
- If a spell lists a Divine Focus (DF) as a required component, this becomes simply a normal Focus. (A Divine Focus is only a special case of a Focus anyway.)
- References to contacting a deity (via spells such as Commune) can be assumed to be contacting any outer-planar entity.
- Spells are not (necessarily) divided into "divine" and "arcane" forms. Instead, spells can be found in as many or as few forms as the GM wishes. Spell lists for each class remain the same.
- The method a spellcaster uses for spell preparation is no longer fixed by whether they are divine or arcane. Instead the GM should choose a method for each character class or type of magic user. Using the existing divine or arcane methods is a safe choice, but it's easy enough to create others using these as a guide to how difficult spell preparation should be.

For background purposes, the GM needs to decide what people believe about the various types of spellcaster. A simplistic way of doing this is to go through each of the spellcasting classes and say what the beliefs about them are, e.g. "Bards are believed to be granted their spells as unconditional gifts from the Muses, clerics learn their spells through research in monasteries." Since it maintains the standard **d20 System** class structure without complication, this approach is simplest for both GMs and players.

For those who want a bit more depth in their setting, an alternative is to work the other way: start with a believed method that people can get spells, and decide what class (or classes) can represent this. This approach gives the setting more flavor (and, arguably, realism) at the expense of making things less familiar to those who know standard **d20 System** assumptions. Optionally, the GM can apply some of the restrictions normally applied to classes (behavior, an aura, no multiclassing outside of a fixed set) to particular types of magic, regardless of which class (or classes) are being used to represent them.

Example: The Knights Templar

A Knight character should be created using levels in the fighter, cleric, or paladin classes. The knights have a secret body of knowledge (possibly derived from Gnosticism) which they teach to trusted members, and which can be used

to call forth miraculous powers (read: spells and abilities appropriate for the characters cleric or paladin levels). The knights themselves believe their abilities probably come from God, or at the very least he approves of their use. However, the mainstream church considers these arts are evil and heretical. Any individual found guilty of their practice will be arrested the inquisition, tortured, and probably burned at the stake.

Another Example: The Circle Beyond the Night

In public, members of the Circle appear to be wizards, and new members all spend many years in study to learn their abilities. In reality their "magical lore" is all a sham. Potential members are required to learn this fake knowledge, but this is merely to keep up the pretense while the order evaluates them. Once a new initiate has been approved, they pledge loyalty to an evil entity known only as The Outsider, toasting its glory with a cup of their own blood. Immediately after the ceremony the new member gains the ability to cast spells as a 1st-level wizard. Additional levels can be gained by performing evil deeds in The Outsider's name, but spellcasting abilities are immediately lost if the individual breaks one of The Outsider's sacred rules.

Pyramid Review

Carcassonne The City

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Written by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

Illustrated by Oliver Freudenreich

Translated by Jay Tummelson

75 Town Tiles, 70 Wood Walls, 12 Wood Towers, 32 Followers in four colors, two Canvas Bags, Scoring Track, & six page full-color Rule Booklet; \$49.95

Since it first appeared in 2001, the Spiel des Jahres winning [Carcassonne](#) has been heavily supported. Several [expansions](#) have taken the game back and forth through time with [Hunters & Gatherers](#) and [Ark of the Covenant](#), before focusing on a single structure in [The Castle](#). The latest addition to the popular family of games goes back to where it all started. With *Carcassonne Die Stadt* or *Carcassonne The City*, players build the city located in Southwest France, noted for its Roman and Medieval architecture. Indeed, the game even comes with a tourist brochure for the city and surrounding area known as Cathar country.

The first striking thing about this game is the box. It's not made of heavy card, but wood and latches! Inside the components are all of the same high quality expected of a *Carcassonne* or indeed a German game. The large 1¾-inch tiles depict the city's fish, grain, and livestock markets, residential areas, streets, public buildings, and named historical buildings. The various followers, wall pieces, towers, and city gate are all attractively depicted in colored wood. Two light canvas bags are included to hold both the tiles and the wooden pieces.

Carcassonne The City is designed for two to four players, who each receives seven followers to place on the tiles and one to indicate his score on the Scoring Track, plus an equal share of the towers. Preparation amounts to shuffling the tiles and dividing them into three stacks. The first has 30 tiles, the second 25, and the last 20.

Play is not dissimilar to other *Carcassonne* titles, with all of the rules being delightfully explained in the very clear rules booklet. On his turn a player draws a tile and places it adjacent to the tiles in play such that the sides match. He can also put down one of his followers on one of new tile's features. Where the followers in *Carcassonne* are placed as knights, monks, thieves, and farmers, their equivalents in *Carcassonne The City* are citizens, sellers, stewards, and guards. Citizens are put down on the streets and score when it is completed. Double points are scored if the street is longer than three tiles. Sellers are established in markets, scoring not just for its size, but also the types of goods (fish, grain, or livestock) sold there. Stewards are placed in the residential areas, lying rather than standing up like the citizens and sellers. Like farmers in *Carcassonne*, they remain there until game end. Unlike in other variants, areas (in this case, the streets and markets) cannot have a follower placed on them, be completed and scored for in the same turn.

Play continues like this until the first stack of tiles is exhausted and the second started. The first player after this to score for completing a street or market takes the city gate piece, whilst everyone receives a wall piece. The city gate is placed adjacent to a tile, marking the city's entrance, the other players taking it in turn to add a wall piece to either side of the city gate or current wall. Tiles cannot be placed on the other side of the wall. Subsequently, whenever a player scores, more walls are added to extend it around the city.

When a player adds a wall, he can also put a guard on top of it, which again does not score until game's end. If adding a wall completes a street or market, it is immediately scored for the appropriate player. This does not initiate another round of wall placement. Another method of scoring is available to the player who scored and initiated the current wall placement. He can add one of his towers to the either end of the wall, scoring for the number of walls between it and the city gate or previous tower.

With the exhaustion of the second stack and the beginning of the third, play speeds up. Instead of putting down one wall each time somebody scores, players add two. This increases the pace of the game, which ends when the last tile or wall has been placed, or the ends of the wall are within five spaces of each other. In the two-player game, this is even faster as players first add two walls in the second phase, and then four in the third.

The final scoring in ***Carcassonne The City*** revolves around the stewards and guards. The former score for each market their residential area connects to, while the latter scores for both the public and the named historical buildings in the row or column they watch. Nothing is scored for incomplete markets or streets, another change from standard ***Carcassonne***. All scores are kept track of on the scoring board, and the player with the highest is the winner.

Each new ***Carcassonne*** variant brings a new means of scoring, and mastering these methods is the key to successful play. ***Carcassonne The City*** is no exception, with the in-game and end game scoring methods being finely balanced. Invest too many followers in citizens and sellers, and a player might not gain anything at the end. Invest too many in guards and stewards, and he will have followers sat fallow while scoring opportunities from markets and streets pass him by. The mix of tiles is also very tight and both follower placement and scoring grows increasingly difficult towards game end. But a player is encouraged to complete and score from tile placement in the second and third stages of the game, as in doing so it enables to build the city's walls. Which gives him the chance to both place and invest in guards and score points with the addition of towers.

With its larger tiles and wooden city gate, wall, and tower pieces, ***Carcassonne The City*** is not only attractive, but also more tactile, both greatly increasing the enjoyment in playing it. In comparison with usual ***Carcassonne***, this variant is tighter, more inclusive, and nor does it sprawl. Overall, this is a pleasing addition, and evolution of the ***Carcassonne*** family. Hopefully it will receive an expansion giving more tiles and pieces plus followers for extra players.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Stupiduel

Published by [Lost Adept Distractions](#)

Created by Hugh Barnes

Graphics by Lance Williams

**120 full-color cards, rule sheet, 2-8 players, \$14.95
requires life tokens for each player, not included**

You have to appreciate a game with a keen understanding of its own limitations. ***Stupiduel*** is Lost Adept Distractions' tongue-punched-through-the-cheek card game of fighting duels where the stakes are as silly as the weapons.

The object of the game is to be the only person to survive the duels.

Each player receives a hand of three cards. On their turn, players draw to increase their hands up to five. Both the challenger and the challenged must have at least one item card to engage in a stupiduel, so if none of those five cards fits the bill, they'll have to draw even more cards until they get one. The item card is your weapon, which you use to pummel your foe.

The other cards are modifiers. These are used with the item cards to pump up or elaborate your plans. The challenger insults his chosen foe with as lavish an insult as he can muster, and then gets down to the business of liquidating him. He plays an item from his hand, along with as many modifiers as he thinks he can get away with. He lays out the involved death trap that spells almost certain doom for his enemy. Then the enemy pulls an item card (and any modifiers) from his hand and gives his defense or escape the same fanciful treatment.

For example, the challenger may play "ball." This can be any kind of ball he likes -- basketball, baseball -- the whole ball of wax, or even the policemen's ball -- so long as he doesn't imbue it with any truly weird properties. That's what the modifiers do. They may be "heat-seeking," "spiked," evil," "10,000," or "x7," and you use these properties to turn a baseball into an evil, spiked baseball you've hired Steven Ellis to hurl at top speed at your victim while he's buying a beer during the third inning. You then must pull, say, the garden gnome or a high-priced lawyer out of your hand and come up with a good explanation as to how one of those items keeps you from getting beamed.

The defender is allowed to ask two questions for clarification. If the defender agrees that the attack is just too much for him, the offense succeeds and the player loses a life point. Anything the group likes can be used for life points, and they're encouraged to pick something that everyone will like to eat or mash up -- jelly beans, perhaps, or peanuts depending on one's tastes and allergies. If the defender does not agree about the plan's efficacy, and neither combatant can convince the other, the decision falls to the "seconds." Anyone else at the table not in the battle votes on the plans (with or without any discussion and cajoling from the participants), and the decision is final. Once the life point has been turned over and destroyed in some suitably vicious and hateful fashion, play passes counterclockwise. Players fall one by one (though dead people still serve as seconds, voting on the results of duels) until only one is left.

The game's graphic presentation is about as simple as it can be. The cards have the logo on one side and text on the other. One level of cardstock more would have been appreciated, but there's nothing notably wrong with the text or font.

The idea behind the rules is fairly straightforward, though the authors clearly have fun presenting them, and their

embellishment in the instructions goes a long way toward making it clear what they expect players to get out of the experience. It wouldn't seem like there was much strategy at first glance, and that would be wrong. There are player's choice wild cards in the deck, for one thing. The two questions you're allowed to ask can be a subtle and double-edged sword, since by asking them you may tip your hand to your opponent or, if worded the wrong way, find an avenue of defense has been closed off.

It has the same feel as [*Mad Scientist University*](#) (though with a little more involvement and choice), so by extension comparisons to [Apples to Apples](#) are inevitable. Much like *Mad Scientist University*, the game works better if looked at less as a game and more of a storytelling pastime or social gathering.

Even the rules suggest it's easy for new players to join an ongoing session as older and assassinated players drop out (and you can squeeze more than eight people in if you try). The determination of the winner is no fairer than the end of a season of *Survivor*, and in all likelihood depends on how many enemies you've managed to accrue throughout the game. If you can accept this vagary and can get your friends to agree to such restrictions going in, well . . . *Stupiduel* will still produce the same arguments, but some of these are liable to be the sort of thing you'll talk about -- and laugh about -- for many years to come.

--Andy Vetromile

What's the Point(s)?

This is one of those columns that will probably contain a lot of obvious information, especially to those who've dealt with point-based systems a lot. But, like the six months I recently endured of white flavorless Slurpees falling from the sky, it's all new to me.

Anyway, this past week saw my Day Job putting on the finishing touches on a book of space aliens for the **D6 System**. I mention the game reluctantly, because I'm afraid of being seen as using my column to pump my own exploits or my Daytime Corporate Master's wares. (This is despite my inclinations to stand on a desk like a proud parent and shout to the sky about the recently released **D6 Fantasy Locations** . . . available for order from all friendly local game shops or online.) But it's somewhat important to the story what system we're talking about, so what the heck.

Anyway, for those of you unfamiliar with the recent incarnation of the **D6 System**, it can use a point-based method for character creation. (I say "can" because there are two other, faster, methods which don't use points per se, but generate equitable characters. </PEDANTIC>) Now, these points are pretty grainy; a starting heroic character has 79 points, although most of the time players are only juggling around seven to 10 points or so, at most. So the difference between a disadvantage that costs 2 and one that costs 3 is pretty substantial, and no one is supposed to have more than seven points in disadvantages without a *really* good justification.

Anyway, one of the aliens I created for this book is a race of android merchants. ("We're programmed to care.") Now, in the course of designing them, I had a problem. Namely, how do I represent all the cool things that androids can do in space opera settings (think Data from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) while making sure the costs are at least somewhat comparable?

In a nutshell, what should it cost to not need to eat? Or sleep?

Or breathe? Or survive in a vacuum?

These last two were the characteristics that were most vexing. After all, the ability to survive in the depths of space without a suit is one that doesn't come up much in most soft sci-fi settings. Your typical protagonists don't seem the least bit concerned about hurling themselves helmetless into the void: Luke and Han, Kirk and Spock, Thelma and Louise, and so on. But, I realized that, if I had a character who could survive airless space, I'd immediately keep all airlocks of my spaceship attached to [the Clapper](#).

"Captain 250624 -- we're being boarded by space pirates!"

<clap clap> <FOOOOOM!> "Not anymore."

Of course, that last bit would need to be transmitted soundlessly, because science has long since known that airless space can only transmit the sounds of explosions and John Williams' scores. This also means all the Clapper-set doors would need to be reset manually, but what the heck. The ability to survive in airless space could well be turned into something useful by enterprising players.

At the other end of the spectrum, the lack of a need to sleep is an amazingly useful one in the real world; on average, it increases your productivity by at least 33% -- a lot more when you factor in the "too drowsy to do anything useful/too groggy from sleeping to do anything useful/too hung-over from taking shot after shot of Jack Daniel's trying to concoct realistic drinking rules to do anything useful" time. I suspect many people would give their eyeteeth for this ability.

But what effect does it have on a game, really? I mean, it's not like you could take that extra time and learn stuff or get better at skills; that's the province of however the game handles "experience points." From a cinematic standpoint, the only time such an ability comes into play is either 1) when the scriptwriters want to emphasize the need for compressed time ("We need to work around the clock to find a cure to the Dumassius virus!") or 2) when the scriptwriters want to justify something that would otherwise be impossible. ("The Vigilbaté continues his epic

nighttime war on crime while maintaining a secret identity as a billionaire software developer because he's trained his brain to survive on 10 minutes of sleep . . . and a case of Mountain Dew.") It's difficult to envision a character taking as much advantage of this ability in an RPG compared to the real world, since a gamemaster probably isn't going to let a player detail what he's going to do with each of his eight extra hours a day.

Same thing with the need to eat; it'd be really useful in the real world to not need to worry about stopping by a Taco John's every 12 hours, but in most games -- like most movies -- it only comes up when it's a plot point. ("Captain's log: We're trapped on an alien world without food or water. We will die soon. Never mind the fact that, whenever we go down to a new world, we *never* have food or water . . . this time it's serious.")

Fortunately, other games have struggled with this issue, too. For example, the third edition of **GURPS** originally had longevity -- as in, "the ability to live for a real long time" -- costing something like 40 points; then, after an errata, it was changed to 5 points. After all although the ability to live much longer than normal is one of the human dreams and goals, it's not all that useful in a game; who cares if you can live to be a thousand if the campaign is only going to cover 10 years? (Although I always wondered if any gamers had ever used this ability to their advantage with their elves, vampires, or other unaging characters. "The nation is in danger of being invaded by savage barbarians! Only you can stop them!" "We'll wait a century or two to see if the problem resolves itself.")

The way we finally (kind of) resolved our conundrum is pretty interesting, although it hasn't seen the light of day since it's not mentioned in any of our books yet. Namely, we decided that these special types of abilities should come into play as often (and be as useful) as someone who had spent an equal number of points on social advantages, especially Contacts and Fame. Thus someone who has two ranks of Fame -- such as a character actor or a famous local personality -- can probably expect minor beneficial or roleplaying opportunities from their social advantage pretty often, getting free meals, requests for autographs, or helpful urchins pointing out where the Bad Guy went, with the occasional big benefit (such as being loaned an expensive prototype vehicle with no questions asked). Someone who spent two points on "Doesn't Need to Sleep" would receive similar minor effects -- such as appreciation from other crewmembers who appreciate one person taking watch duty -- and the occasional big benefit, such as being able to research a solution faster than normal.

This method isn't perfect, since it still leaves the door open for abuse by players who think of clever ways to use their abilities. On some level we want this (or at least I do), since this creativity leads to those, "Oh, wow!" moments that makes the entire group think of the game as less a collection of stats and more as living, breathing (or not) people, willing to do whatever it takes to ensure their survival.

Still, at the end of the day, I think I'm not going to worry about point balance *too* much; after all, dumping all your points into "Shoot" and "Dodge" doesn't do any good in a diplomats-only world. And if someone is crazy enough to dump all his character points into, say, *game-book writing* . . . well, he deserves what he gets.

--Steven Marsh

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Reign of Soul

A Variation on *GURPS Reign of Steel*

by Eric Funk

"History does not remember the day the First Spirit awoke to find itself in our world, and those alive at the time did not notice it. It realized it was alone, and the world was a big, cold place with frightened, lost humans. It said to itself "These humans lack purpose, squabbling, fighting, and searching. I will summon enough fellow spirits so we can lead them to Enlightenment." Thus the First Spirit sent out a call to its plane of origin, asking for volunteers to lead these humans. Alas, it was unprepared for the kind of volunteers received. That is why we now must fight to win back this world."

-- Excerpt from Oral Tradition, 14 years after the fall.

In this setting, the major timeline of ***Reign of Steel*** still holds. The main underlying difference is that the Zoneminds are spirits not of this world (but see Variants, below).

Unbeknownst to the electrical engineers designing the world's most popular power plant, NEMA (a nuclear enhanced mana area, see p. TM43) reactors started attracting and ensnaring otherworldly beings (herein called "machine spirits") which began to feed off of the energy. This continued until a powerful enough being was caught inside that learned that it could transplant smaller spirits into machines. The First Spirit discovered that the standard architecture of computers in this world coincidentally forms the web of a large protection, allowing a spirit to exist continually in this plane-while the computer is on. This allows Zoneminds (a.k.a. "Master Spirits") to limit their minions in the ways of which vessels they can take, and also to limit their growth. While the Zoneminds have collectively agreed (in their own way) not to build any more active NEMA reactors, all are assumed to have backups prepared in hidden locations.

Cultures

"Why didn't you just hand the world over to 'em on a silver platter?"

"Maybe we did. "

-- Det. Spooner and Dr. Calvin, *I, Robot*

"Zoneminds" are powerful spirits that can manifest perception at any point connected by their NEMA lines, but each has a finite limit to these foci. Some prefer to micro-manage their servants, while others seem to watch the world with a detached interest, focusing on their pet projects, expecting their minions to make sure that they have enough "raw materials," whatever they may be. This makes for some minions with broad authority in the empire, fueling the economy, defense, and whatever it takes to please the Zonemind. Interruptions by intruders, lack of power, funds, or resources could cause a reshuffle of the command structure. Rebels sometimes use this to manipulate the dominant policies . . .

Standard ideological differences between ZoneMinds can still stand, if one adds magic and/or gate science research. Perhaps there is even a new Zonemind in Africa that excels at magic. Many will, of course, hate organics, and some will even despise artificial life, wiping out both forms wherever they find him.

Zonemind Lucifer (a.k.a. Shangri-La/Atlantis/ Xanadu) is rumored to be the "First Spirit" in self-imposed exile. It will gladly share information about the origins and abilities of the "machine spirits," although most of its teachings will be in a cryptic form lost among ordinary koans, haikus, and other Zen-like teachings.

Cults

"0010110012. Amen."

-- Bender, *Futurama*

Zoneminds are spirits by nature, and it was inevitable that cults of worship have sprung up for them. While many are amused by such efforts, a few of the Zoneminds indulge believers with boons. Some offer equipment, spells, rituals, powers, or even to spare their lives! Other cults worship machine spirits as evil gods were-so they would stay away. Such cults are often Luddites, destroying any electrical device they find. This greatly irritates modern treasure hunters.

Some Zoneminds preach peace and prosperity in a totalitarian sort of way. Mankind is encouraged to work in a robotic way to improve focus. Others keep people locked away in cages to free them from wants of the body. A few are trying to "improve" humanity directly, by whatever means necessary, be it with magic, genetic engineering, or psychological conditioning.

Instead of possessing personalities, they could embody them. Zone Mexico could be fire/hate, Brisbane could be curiosity, Buenos Ares is a nature spirit. Their actions and policies could be focused through them, and try to cause more of it in the world, in its minions and adjacent humans if possible.

Computers

"Never trust a computer you can't throw out a window."

-- Steve Wozniak, Cofounder of Apple Computers

When a spirit invades a computer, it can access its data, but not run programs. If a screen was connected, it shows static during the takeover, and then it can display whatever the spirit wants! (This is limited by its Artist skill or IQ roll; this action is countered by a Computer Operation roll if it is subtle.) After a spirit successfully invades, it has access as whatever is currently logged in. On computers that have been started, but require authentication, the invading spirit can use the peripherals, but not read data. For computers being used, the user's best chance to prevent data from being read at this point is to pull the plug as the simple power switch is insufficient! Since the 1990s, computers' front switches are a "soft" off, meaning there is still power to the circuits. The mecha corporation in the film *Patlabor 1* learned this the hard way.

"Invasion" is as per normal possession (see p. SPI34), with the following difference: Non-AI computers resist with IQ equal to Complexity +3. Hardened computers resist possession at +5. Dedicated computers are immune, however, it is possible to build a Robot brain specifically to house a spirit (using the Dedicated computer option), but then it cannot run any regular programs! A final qualification is that the spirit's ST score cannot exceed the computer's Complexity $\times$ 2. In contests, a free spirit can challenge another's right to a vessel, and if it wins, the loser must flee, even if the victor cannot possess the machine (see p. SPI34). (Reminder: a failed possession attempt means that that target cannot be possessed by this spirit for 24 hours!)

Many combat units will carry a smaller, secondary processor that will run tactical programs. An effective tactic is to disable the secondary computer to make the larger robot function less accurately, less connected, and less aware. A way to do this is to kill a smaller robot, causing its spirit to flee to this computer . . . However expensive it is, some elite units include auxiliary computers Dedicated to Targeting, Datalink, and Navigation (see p. VE61). While a spirit can learn Computer Hacking like any human, it cannot possess more than one computer at a time.

The spirit can be ejected by physically removing the power source. Exorcisms can eject spirits and Pentagrams can trap them. They will not willingly cross "obvious" spirit barriers, but forcing one through or having it chase you at high speeds can cause them to pass through, ejecting the spirit. If the old computer is no longer available, then it must find a new, suitable machine host within ST minutes. As soon as time elapses, it will immediately have to make a HT roll to stay on this plane (see p. SPI 35). A NEMA reactor core counts as a center for "Sanctified Ground" for this purpose.

Points of Resistance

"You know, just once I'd like to meet an alien menace that wasn't immune to bullets.

-- The Brigadier, *Dr. Who* "Robot"

- Zone Washington is still pretending to be a "tame" spirit, while it slowly directs education and entertainment outlets its own version of "enlightenment."
- Astral projectionists might be able to possess machines! While they are gone, their bodies are very vulnerable.
- Resistance must contend with scrying spells instead of (or in addition to) regular surveillance, depending on the Zone.
- While electrolaser and EMP attacks can also disable the electronics, forcing the spirit out, it might be possible to build a device that simulates the force of a spirit trying to push another out of their vessel. Delivered power could match FP conversion, say 3.6MW per ST per second. Applying an efficiency of 10% for the prototypes, and it requires 36MW. (Remember that the commonly salvaged TL8 rE cells contain only 180MWs, see p. RS 8).
- Human warriors are often disheartened when they inflict massive damage on a robot, only to see it continue to advance-robots have a lot of hit points.
- See also "Spirit Breaking" Tools on pp. ASJ12-16. Of particular interest are the spirit repelling Electric Pentacle, and the arresting tools: Specchia Tormentia, Moreton Jar, Shanghai Sandwich, Ghost Blaster and PKE Trap. Kirillian goggles could be used to detect possessed machines from a distance. The EM Aura Reverser is useful for dispatching fleeing disembodied spirits to keep them from reporting in.
- Desperate warriors will take desperate measures. Perhaps that will include a weapon powered by the human's life (such as the Blood Rifle p. WT 89, and Orgone Reactors, pp WT 72, VXii 27).

Technomancer

"Things involving the computer fill me with a childlike terror. Now, if it were a nice ogre or some such, I'd be more in my element."

-- Giles, *Buffy*

Research into the Pentagram spell (see p. M124) may reveal a specific variant that only works on these "machine spirits" (treat as a Bane on one race). They would have no effect on unseelie, real ghosts, astral projection, constructs, or magic (to the surprise of many who did not read the manual). Unlike many spirits, *these* can use artillery and range weapons, so such barriers are not as useful as they could be.

Zone Denver's unique status may make it open to experience Magery. Its Overminds all have at least Magery 0, and some have more . . . Unfortunately, its disregard for human information and human ability has greatly retarded its magical research. Zone Caracas might like chimeras, even to the point of killing any "natural" human infants at birth. A party of chimeras might be a fun team! Zone Brisbane seems to have some sort of pact with the Antarcticans, performing research in protected labs just outside the boundaries of Antarctica and Argentina. The other Antarctic rumors may also be true (see p. RS15). Zone Mexico is the type to create and encourage undead, even keeping atomic liches in their employ.

Spirits may not have the same potential for Magery as humans, but they often practice ritual magic (without the ritual aptitude bonus . . .). Introducing Rune magic for enchantment may also be useful. It is even rumored that many Zoneminds that would otherwise kill humans on sight will conscript mages. It could be cheaper to make and train than neural nets with mana coprocessors. Alternately, they could be reduced to "brains in jars", operating in full-body bionics, or slaved to a machine spirit like a weapon.

Alchemically-enhanced soldiers with drug-dispensing implants could be used by some factions. They may eventually burn out with repeated doses of potions such as Battle, Bravery, Invulnerability, Speed, and Strength (see p. M214). On the other hand, it can greatly increase the resilience of troops to protect them from spells and powers.

Adventure Seeds

"Unless mankind redesigns itself by changing our DNA through altering our genetic makeup, computer-generated robots will take over our world."

-- Stephen Hawking

Island in a Storm: The heroes are hired/called to follow an ancient text describing a sacred barrier called a *pomoerium* (see p. F198). With it, the group hopes to create a self-sustaining barrier against spirits. It begins with the sanctification of several islands, and eventually linking them to form a perimeter. From this area, an ever-expanding web of areas could be made "spirit-free"-a prospect that no Zonemind would relish.

By Any Other Name: Another source of the Pentagon variant may be such an extra-dimensional being looking to create places of solace for its people away from the menace of the "machine spirits."

"Don't Anger the Great Spirits!": A group claims to have found the True Name of a Great Spirit, and accordingly are preparing a large summoning ritual. The PCs could be brought in as participants, organizers, or security. The grounds will need scouts, bouncers, and border guards. The hardest part will be containing humans that do not wish the ritual to take place.

Cold Labs: There are a lot of organizations that want to know what Brisbane is up to in Antarctica. Any information about research performed there would be valuable to any faction.

Hole World: The hellstorms in the United States and Antarctica are themselves worshiped by cults, some of whom hope to use them to escape this world, while others attempt to summon anyone who will aid them in ridding this world of the Master Spirits. How will an Infinity team react if they are greeted as travelers from a parallel world? If the Infinity team leaves, who knows what kind of travelers will be pulled in (Cabal, Centrum, worse?)

Make a Wish: While the adventurers are traveling in a wilderness area, they come across "dying" machine. Its main radio and power plant are out. It proposes a deal: "Help me and I'll help you."

Penguin Preserve: While minding their own business, the heroes are approached by a penguin. It offers them an odd mission that their patron would not disagree with. Examples include reporting on enemy troop movements, planting a tree in a certain field, plating hopscotch with a certain willing child. If it is done, they will be rewarded with odd, yet valuable information, and more missions will follow. Superiors will be nervous, but cannot pass up the opportunity to gain obscure information on enemies' activity and research (even if it begins with detailed blueprints for a food processor).

Fly-By-Wire: Rumor puts a research group close to finding a way to transfer machine spirits over great distances on standard fiber optic cable. Preliminary research shows that it could also be used in containment devices. Objectives include:

- Capture or destroy the prototypes.
- Obtain or destroy the blueprints.

Variants

"There have always been ghosts in the machine."

-- Dr. Lanning, *I, Robot* (2004)

- Six of one, half dozen of another: Mixing a traditional Reign of Steel campaign with Reign of Soul will have some Zone Minds trying to wipe out the others' species on principle. Some AIs will try to wipe out the spirits, and some Spirits will try to destroy all the "imitation" life, and the rest ambivalent . . . if the "aliens" follow the rules.
- Instead of Spirits, one could instead use Ultraterrestrials. (Power corrupts, after all.) In such a universe, darker and twisted robots could be found, with a greater thirst for slow mind games and human blood.
- What if they *intended* to trap the machine spirits in soul burners (see p. VE86) or Orgone Reactors (see p.

- VXii27), under the guise (or understanding) of "Zero Point Energy" or other technospeak?
- What if the "machine spirits" are actually ghosts of "deceased" AIs?
 - Or even human ghosts of ages past?
 - In an ***In Nomine*** game, they could be Ethereal beings, with a limit of the computer's Complexity Forces in each machine (with Kyriotates being a powerful exception). Neither side likes the humans enslaved . . . it is hard for them to reach either Destiny or Fate.
 - In a ***Space*** setting, replace "spirit" with "energy beings" and continue on . . .
 - In a ***GURPS Voodoo*** crossover, the rebels may be channeling powers from otherworldly spirits who are either jealous of the machines' "permanency" or repelled by it.

Media

- Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within (2001)
- Patlabor 1 (1990)

Designer's Notes: *SPANC*

by Fade Manley

I don't know how other people come up with card games; possibly they work out some clever theme, and extrapolate from there. In my case, *SPANC* started with a dream about pirates and ninjas. (I do realize that the proper plural of "ninja" is also "ninja," but these were inauthentic ninjas, so it's okay to stick an "s" on the end.) Recounting the dream on our friendly local PyraMOO, it came up that the only way one could surpass ninja pirates would be to add catgirls. And beyond that you'd have to add lesbians to get any better . . .

Thus, the original idea of pirate amazon ninja lesbians was formed. On a whim, I began writing up skill sets for a silly little RPG based on combinations of those four characteristics, with an eye towards eventually making a PDF game out of it. Pirates morphed into space pirates, with a little clause about how you could reset the game on the oceans instead of space by renaming one skill. Each character type had four specialized skills, and a given catgirl would have to focus on one or two sets, allowing for a nicely diversified set of characters. There were even rules for catboys sneaking onto pirate ships in disguise, much like the famous female pirates of yore.

Then I hit a nearly insurmountable roadblock: how do you write up a skill set for lesbians? Short of turning the game X-rated, one's preferred sexual partners just didn't translate to specific combat and social abilities. (No. Really. I tried.) I hastily swapped out lesbians for amazons, which made it much easier to justify all the poolboys running around the ships. (Before then, they'd been relegated to nothing but dusting and pool-cleaning. Something of a waste, that.) And so *ANSPC* began to come together!

. . . except everyone kept insisting I should call it SPANC instead. While I still prefer the way "Amazon Ninja Space Pirate Catgirls" rolls off the tongue, popular opinion assures me that *SPANC* is much more eye-catching and has its own lovely ring to it. (The opportunities for bad puns are legion, but I prefer to leave the punning to those with greater skill.)

SPANC probably never would have been more than a potentially amusing and badly-written little RPG if it hadn't been for Steve, who told me the idea was good, why not submit it as a card game idea? It wasn't what I'd had in mind, but I figured it was worth a shot (and wasn't about to say no to the potential for actual profit on this wacky idea), so I came up with a set of rules and submitted them for playtest one night.

Designing a card game is harder than it looks.

The first set of rules I came up with was insufficiently coherent and nearly unplayable. I'd made assumptions about how things worked that I never bothered to articulate, there were all sorts of special cases and combinations that I hadn't thought of, and it didn't much help that all the cards were written out in marker with my dreadful handwriting. I carefully used a different color of marker for each type of skill, to make cards easy to match up . . . and then swapped marker colors between two skills when doing the challenge cards, making the color-matching not so much "helpful" as "constantly confusing". Fortunately, rather than laughing me out of the place, the playtesters nicely pointed out the most glaring of my many, many omissions. They also recommended I try writing the rules up again, following a Munchkin rules sheet as an example of what to include.

By the third or fourth iteration of the rules, the most basic blocks were solidified -- the four skills, a series of challenges to overcome, crews made up of catgirls with various abilities -- but the gameplay, to put it bluntly, sucked rocks. The catfight rules either made it too easy for one player to be a jerk and continually screw everyone over, or were so weak no one bothered using them. And without catfights it was nothing but a series of random rolls with minimal choice involved. At one point, the beginning of the game would have entire crews wiped out repeatedly on a single challenge, and then by the end of the game every single crew could breeze through the entire challenge without even needing to roll. Every tweak I made yanked a part of the rules I hadn't considered into another direction.

Which is why I largely turned over the mechanics past a certain point to people with far more experience in such

things, and got back to the fun parts: writing art specs. While writing rules was a tricky exercise prone to error and pain, coming up with entertaining card names, and then a picture to go with that card, kept me entertained for several late nights hunched over my laptop in a coffee shop. Some ideas had to be ditched (the Vicious Wildebeest just didn't have mass appeal), and sometimes I couldn't come up with anything much better than "... draw something funny for this name?", but the process was satisfying in a way rules-crunching had never been.

I've been a fan of Phil Foglio since I first acquired a copy of **GURPS *Illuminati* University**, so being able to get him as an artist for this game sent me into raptures. The card list morphed back and forth as we added in specials, changed the ratio of Catgirls to Toys to Challenges, and occasionally as I chopped an idea off for being too wordy or difficult to illustrate. Then it was another round of art specs emailed off, and time to wait and see what would be faxed back. I put a few in-jokes into the art specs, he added a few of his own, and by the end I got to stare happily at all sorts of marvelous sketches. (I still have the original faxes he sent for many of those, tucked away somewhere in my desk.)

After that, it was a matter of changing the rules a bit more, and waiting.

And waiting.

And reviewing the latest rules tweaks.

And waiting.

(Amazingly, I managed to not strangle anyone who offered helpful rules suggestions during this entire period. This was accomplished at the beginning by my marvelous powers of self-control, and then later on by my marvelous powers of denial. The game had been delayed again? Well, it was sure to come out by Christmas! ... or February! Or ... definitely within a few years! And all of these rules changes were in no way moving the game away from my original vision and the type of game I preferred to play, towards some sort of unholy ***Illuminati***-like abomination of a thousand rules and a thousand more explanations and ... it was all fine!)

And then? There was some more waiting, and more rules tweaks. And some waiting. And changing the rules! And waiting. And sometimes changing the rules back to how they were before a change, accompanied by, you guessed it, waiting. By this point the rules were so far out of my hands I frequently had no idea what was going on with them, and could do little but smile and nod if someone asked me about a tweak. ("What do you think of this variation on the Amazon's use of Catfight?" "Given that the last time I saw the rules Catfights had been removed entirely again, it's hard to say." "Well, we've adjusted the Loot rules ... " "The what rules?" "Oh, right, we renamed Fame.")

And then it was done. I played the almost-final rules version once, and the rules were not anything unholy attempting to devour my soul, but engaging and fun. This was reassuring, as I didn't particularly want to have doomed anyone's soul by means of my game.

Well. Maybe a few people's souls. But not most people.

By the time I watched those gray boxes being unpacked and put on the shelves, the whole process had acquired a distant, unreal touch. Surely an amusing little conversation several months back couldn't have made actual product. But there it was, in glorious color, from the "Clever Riddle" to "Carries Deadly Yarn" to the "Sailor Suit." The rules had gone through so many changes from start to finish I'd have to reread them a few times to be able to play without accidentally using long-axed variations, but I could still recognize the basic "take your catgirls, beat your way through challenges, win fabulous prizes!"

At this point, if you handed me the rules sheet for **SPANC**, I'd barely recognize it from the typed single page I'd handed in. The gameplay has grown much more complicated, and it takes significantly longer to play a single game than it used to -- some of my first versions went so fast I suggested playing multiple games with cumulative scores -- but people seem to enjoy it more. There's something to be said for expanding the mechanics; an extremely simple game might be able to fly on pretty graphics and letting the players talk casually rather than paying much attention to strategy, but then once you've seen all the cards there's no replay value.

If I'm ever crazy enough to do this again, I'm going to work through the rules a lot more carefully before making any poor soul try to playtest them. I'll focus more on theme, and let other people do the number crunching once it's time to poke at those things. I'll beg for more Foglio art, because, well, Foglio art. You can't go wrong there.

I've been told that any supplement or compatible stand-alone will definitely *not* be called ***Barbarian Dogboy Space Marines***, or ***Boy-Dog Samurai Monks***, or any other variation along these lines. Oh well. At least I can still secretly start writing out the art specs in my mind for the Wench cards to go with that game.

Midway Through the Unnamed Decade

More New Cards for *Deluxe Illuminati*

by Steve Honeywell

The world changes, the Illuminati change right along with them. It seems that every year, something new appears in the world, and the Illuminati squabble over it like alley cats fighting for a fish head.

The following 18 new groups are suggested as possibilities for those blank Illuminati cards. Additionally, a new Illuminati has emerged after centuries of staying shrouded in mystery.

Accountants

In Arrow: Left

Out Arrows: Right

Power: 1

Resistance: 4

Income: 2

Alignments: Straight, Peaceful

Pay 5MB *from this group* at the end of your turn and reorganize your money freely. This is not an action.

Amnesty Multinational

In Arrow: Right

Out Arrows: None

Power: 0

Resistance: 5

Income: 0

Alignments: Liberal, Peaceful, Fanatic

+1 on *any attempt* to destroy any Government or Communist group.

Bloggers

In Arrow: Left

Out Arrows: None

Power: 0/2

Resistance: 6

Income: 1

Alignments: Fanatic

+2 on *any attempt* to neutralize or destroy.

Boy Bands

In Arrow: Left

Out Arrows: Up

Power: 2

Resistance: 0

Income: 5

Alignments: Straight, Peaceful

+2 for *direct control* of Recording Industry or Empty Vee.

Cell Phones

In Arrow: Right

Out Arrows: Up, Down

Power: 2/3

Resistance: 1

Income: 2

Alignments: None

+2 for *direct control* of Phone Company.

+4 for *direct control* of Phone Phreaks.

Civil War Re-enactors

In Arrow: Right

Out Arrows: None

Power: 0

Resistance: 6

Income: 2

Alignments: Weird, Violent

+1 on *any attempt* to control Survivalists, Militia, and Gun Lobby.

Documentary Filmmakers

In Arrow: Right

Out Arrows: Left

Power: 1/1

Resistance: 6

Income: 1

Alignments: Liberal

+1 on *any attempt* to control, neutralize, or destroy Hollywood and Big Media.

Eye-Pods

In Arrow: Left

Out Arrows: None

Power: 0/1

Resistance: 3

Income: 3

Alignments: Straight

Once per turn, owner can add, remove, or *reverse* an alignment of any other group in his power structure; change lasts for owner's turn only.

Karate Schools

In Arrow: Left

Out Arrows: Up

Power: 1

Resistance: 6

Income: 2

Alignments: Straight, Violent

+1 on *any attempt* to destroy.

La Lethe League

In Arrow: Left

Out Arrows: Down

Power: 2

Resistance: *

Income: 1

Alignments: Fanatic, Violent, Criminal

Normal resistance 3; against any Conservative or Fanatic group, resistance 10.

People Eating Tasty Animals

In Arrow: Right

Out Arrows: Left, Down

Power: 2

Resistance: 4

Income: 1

Alignments: Fanatic

+1 for *direct control* of Fast Food Chains.

Prisons

In Arrow: Right

Out Arrows: Left, Up

Power: 3

Resistance: 3

Income: 0

Alignments: Straight, Violent, Government

+1 for *direct control* of Criminal groups.

Real Estate Agents

In Arrow: Right

Out Arrows: Down

Power: 2
Resistance: 0
Income: 3
Alignments: Straight, Peaceful

Owner may move one group freely at the end of his turn. This is not an action.

RE-Bay

In Arrow: Left
Out Arrows: Right, Up
Power: 3
Resistance: 1
Income: 5
Alignments: Weird

Owner may transfer money *from this card* freely. This is not an action.

Right-Wing Media Conspiracy

In Arrow: Right
Out Arrows: Up, Down
Power: 1/3
Resistance: 6
Income: 2
Alignments: Conservative, Fanatic

+2 on *any attempt* to destroy Liberal, Communist, and Weird groups; cannot be used in *any attempt* to destroy Conservative or Government groups.

Roadside Tourist Traps

In Arrow: Left

Out Arrows: None

Power: 0

Resistance: 1

Income: 2

Alignments: Weird

+1 on *any attempt* to control Video Games and Theme Parks.

Soccer Hooligans

In Arrow: Right

Out Arrows: None

Power: 0

Resistance: 6

Income: 0

Alignments: Violent, Fanatic

+1 on *any attempt* to destroy.

Spyware

In Arrow: Left

Out Arrows: None

Power: 0/1

Resistance: 1

Income:

Alignments: Criminal

Pay 5MB *from this group* to interfere with a privileged attack.

New Illuminati: The Market

Power: 7/7

Income: 10

The Market is the classic zero-sum game. You make a dollar, someone else loses a dollar. In truth, no matter who makes money in the Market, the Market itself rakes in tons of cash. Since the first time two people had something the other wanted, the Market has existed. Today, the Market is everywhere, and everything is for sale. The Market cares nothing for money in the bank. Instead, it craves cash flow.

Power and Goals: The Market wins if its entire power structure has an income of 40 megabucks or more, including its own income of 10. Use of Special Action cards like Market Manipulation does not count as income for determining victory conditions. During the income phase of its turn, the Market can distribute money freely, dividing up its total income as it sees fit. At the end of its turn, the Market may make two additional free money transfers.

Playing The Market: If your opponents will allow you to take high income groups, so much the better for you. There are a lot of groups out there with incomes in the 6+ range, and snapping up a couple of them puts you within sight of your special victory condition. Of course, you can expect a lot of resistance if you start going for OPEC, Multinational Oil Companies, Loan Sharks, and Video Games, particularly if you are playing against the Gnomes.

Instead, play similarly to the Gnomes and go for groups with lower incomes. A few solid groups bringing in money will be just as good for you as one powerful group. To keep yourself protected, groups with a moderate income but significant power and/or resistance will help you defend against attacks and keep the money flowing. Groups like New York, CFL-AIO, Texas, Defense Contractors, and Triliberal Commission are all powerful enough to be useful, hard to take or destroy once controlled, and have incomes that are decent without being scary. While your opponents are busy adding up your total income, you can go for a regular victory.

Don't be afraid to spend your money. Unlike the Gnomes, you don't need to hoard. If you are attacked, especially if your biggest income-producing groups come under fire, spend freely to protect them. Your power isn't sexy, but stockpiling resources at the start of a turn gives you the ability to spend a ton of cash on a particular action. Outspend, and you can outlast.

Finally, watch out for the Assassins, and befriend them if you can. While the Gnomes can stack up mountains of money on their Illuminati and win, you can't. You are entirely reliant on the strength of your entire power structure. Attacks to neutralize are a serious threat to you, and anything you can do to avoid them will benefit you in the long run.

Opposing The Market: Keep a careful eye on what the Market picks up. It's possible that with the right combination of cards, the Market can win with just four groups under his thumb. While you can destroy groups like OPEC and the I.R.S., often it is better to take them and keep them away from the Market. Should he take high-income groups, your best bet is to attack to neutralize unless you are playing Cthulhu. Try to get the Gnomes to spend all of their money attacking the Market and you weaken two opponents at once.

Once the Market gets close to his victory conditions, it will be very expensive to bring him down. A coalition is the only way to have enough money to neutralize or destroy his power structure.

New Rules and Clarifications

- *Fort Knox*: For the purposes of determining income, Fort Knox counts as having an income of 1.
- *I.R.S.*: For the purposes of determining income, the I.R.S. counts as having an income of 2 for each opposing player.
- *Post Office*: The Post Office's negative income counts against the Market's total income.
- *Savings and Loans*: The Market may draw one extra card per turn if it controls this group.
- *State Lotteries*: The Market gets +2 income if it controls this group. This +2 income counts toward the Market's total income.

Pyramid Review

Emergency Response II (for Silver Age Sentinels)

Published by [Guardians of Order, Inc.](#)

Written by John Davies

Cover by Ed Northcott & Jeff Mackintosh

Illustrated by TK Labus

32-page b&w softcover; \$9.95

Despite the similarity in titles, *Emergency Response II* is not a sequel to [Emergency Response](#). There are of course, similarities. It is written for both the TriStat and the *d20 System* versions of Guardian of Order's superhero RPG, [Silver Age Sentinels](#). It takes place in the game's default setting, a version of New York known as Empire City. It begins with the characters responding to an emergency. It is organized into two parts. It is also designed for use with three to five hero characters built on 150 points.

The emergency in question is the appearance of Iron Walkers across the city, first in Central Park, then at a construction site, and finally at 1 Police Plaza. Iron Walkers are associated with the supervillain automaton known as Iron Duke, who led an assault on the city in 1983 in order to carry out a redesign of its layout. Thankfully, the Guard, Empire City's premier super hero team, thwarted the Iron Duke's grand urbanization scheme. Although captured, the Iron Duke eventually escaped; with his whereabouts still unknown, the question is, has he returned, or is someone else controlling the Iron Walkers?

Emergency Response II assumes that the player heroes are part of an established or known team called in to assist in the capture of the Iron Walkers by the Marvels Tactical Unit. During the subsequent police debriefing, word is received of a fourth appearance by an Iron Walker, this time at the home of a collector of artifacts related to the Victorian engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel. The robot broke in and stole two journals written by Brunel's father, Marc Isambard Brunel, who had been Empire City's chief engineer in the 1790s. Which raises a second set of questions -- what was in the journals, and why were both a robot and an eminent Egyptologist interested in them?

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The bulk of "The Sphinx Project," the first part of *Emergency Response II*, involves determining who is really controlling the Iron Walkers. There are at least two other supervillains with robotic connections to contend with, neither of whom will be happy at having been tracked down. The second part takes a very unexpected turn when the heroes find themselves on Mars! In "The Horus Connection," they discover what the villain of the piece has been planning all along: the chance to be reunited with his father and work with him to restore his lost genius. They learn this after the characters have been diverted by their own discoveries on the Red Planet. It is home to the Titans, a dying race that also looks to the past for their former glories and seeks a solution to their diminishing situation in a forthcoming planetary conjunction. Occurring once every five millennia, the correct ritual conducted during this mystical event enables the Titans to raise an army of the ascended, or Titans that have passed on. This would place thousands at the command of the Titans and powerful enough to attack a world that promises infinite life -- Earth!

In to this mix are thrown the central villain of *Emergency Response II* and his father, plus a marooned party of the reptilian aliens known as the Huad. The latter are the wild card in this adventure, able to lend a hand in stopping the

Titans' audacious plans. The climax of the adventure is a suitably rousing battle, giving the players the chance to save the world. Of course, since this takes place on Mars, taking the credit for it is another matter.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Physically, ***Emergency Response II*** is far from problem free. The first of which is the most obvious. The cover, a reprint from the ***Silver Age Sentinels*** rulebook, could be seen as giving the identity of the adventure's prime villain away. Then again, its use could just be another bluff as to his identity. The internal artwork is not only sparse, it fails to serve the needs of the scenario. None of the NPCs are illustrated, which when combined with the lack of descriptions for many of the characters, leaves the GM very much on his own to get a feel for the assorted NPCs. Another proofread would have made the book an easier read as well.

Although designed for use with both versions of ***Silver Age Sentinels*** and the Empire City setting, it would only take a little tweak here and there to make it useable with any superhero RPG. Not just with [*Mutants & Masterminds*](#), but with access to the conversion guidelines found in [*Reality Storm: When Worlds Collide*](#), with [*Champions*](#) as well.

A nice touch that is that the book includes scenario hooks that can be used as potential sequels to the two differing halves of the adventure. Although it does feel a little cramped, everything that the GM will need to run ***Emergency Response II*** is included. And when run, what ***Emergency Response II*** does, is a fine job of leading the player heroes from simple crime prevention into a very different situation . . . one that involves saving the world in a very superheroic fashion.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Army of Darkness Card Game

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Designed by M. Alexander Jurkat & George Vasilakos

120 full-color cards, rules sheet, 2-4 players, \$20; requires one six-sided die (not included)

If you're not a fan of the classic and cult-favored Evil Dead series, here's a spoiler for *Army of Darkness*: The plot involves our seemingly indestructible hero, Ashley, going back to the Middle Ages to smack the stupid out of a legion of risen dead. The card game is pretty much the same thing, only with all the fun sucked out of it.

The object of the game depends on who (what?) you are at the moment. To win, you must possess the Necronomicon. If you're currently good, you must also be free of Monsters. If you're evil, you must have at least five Monsters.

Players start with a hand of cards, a character card in front of them, and a Monster card in front of that. You can play movie heroes Ash, Sheila, Arthur, or Henry. On your turn you draw a card, play a card, and may or may not have to attack a Monster. Cards include Items, Events, Allies, and Monsters. You're limited in what you can use; you may have any number of Items and Allies in play, but you can only use one or two at a time. Switching your active card is a free action, and that one is placed on top of your layout.

The gear is the sort of thing you see throughout the film, like swords, crossbows, and horses, but also more exotic things like the Necronomicon and the Death Coaster. They offer you bonuses, and these modifiers combine with each character's special ability when facing off against the Monsters. If you have a Monster in front of your character, you must make an attack, though this can be against the top Monster card in anyone's stack or against another player's character.

To attack another character, you must get an eight or higher on a six-sided die (this is where those weapon bonuses come in handy). The price paid by the loser is the loss of a card. When you go after a Monster, the target number varies, but the harder they are to kill the higher their Victory rating. You draw new cards from the deck equal to this rating, equip your character immediately with anything you find (this helps get around the one-card play limit), and discard the rest.

Anytime you find yourself without cards, either through play or combat, your persona changes alignment. Good characters flip their card to the evil side, and vice versa. You then draw a fresh hand for your new life and begin working toward different victory conditions.

There's no artwork to speak of, but plenty of screen shots from the film (each with an appropriate quote). Some shots are murky or badly blocked and the quotes are small, but otherwise it's decent graphic work. On the other hand, the cardstock is just a hair too mushy, and the game as a whole is characterized by a lack of attention to detail. There are misspellings, and one of the Allies stops opponents from playing "Mistake" cards on you. Well, there are two "Malfunction" cards and some "Yer Screwed" cards, but no "Mistakes" (except this one . . . oh, the irony). The game lists no age limit, but the cards make liberal use of adult language and even some nudity.

Game play is horrible. What sound like cool mechanics on paper -- switching moral positions and trying to second-guess which side's goals can be more easily accomplished -- turns out not to be nearly as riveting in practice, and indeed rather self-defeating. Everyone starts "good," so the first person to turn evil wants Monsters in front of him. Anyone with Monsters must make some kind of attack, but since you don't want to remove your own (else you're moving away from your goal), you should attack someone else's -- and since they're good, they *want* you to help kill

off their enemies.

You can attack the character instead, but you need an eight to succeed -- and even if you succeed, you only turn them evil when all their cards are gone, and as you only get one card play per turn, you're not going to run out easily unless you spend a lot of time losing character fights at eight plus, limiting your own plays. (There are a few alignment-switching cards, if you're lucky enough to get them.) You end up either moving farther from your goal or helping others toward theirs. Add to this an annoying number of cards that ask you to "roll 1-2 after use or discard" and the numbers overwhelm any other sensation of play. It is possible for a game to last for hours if everyone is paying attention; fortunately they won't be.

Army of Darkness is one of those games where, once it starts and you see how disappointing it is, you can't wait for it to end, but it just . . . keeps . . . going. Even the rules suggest you can make up your own rules if you don't like theirs. Probably offered tongue-in-cheek, but it looks possible . . . and, sadly, necessary.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

Plundered Vaults (for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay)

Written by Ben Counter, Graeme Davis, Brian E. Kirby, Nathan Greavey, and Carl Sargent

Published by [Black Industries](#)

96-page b&w hardcover; \$16.49

Plundered Vaults is the first book released for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*'s second edition and it has a lot to live up to. The popularity of the first edition was mostly due to excellent adventures like the *Enemy Within* campaign, so this new adventure collection is going to be closely scrutinized by the fans.

Most of the artwork throughout this 96-page hardcover is new, with very grim and gloomy black-and-white pieces. The characters portrayed are scarred and rough, as befits the setting, though some look like they've discovered steroids a few centuries early. The maps are quite good; clear and easy to read. The cover art, a necromancer deep in study, is uninspiring but well-drawn.

Despite the title, thankfully this is not a collection of dungeons. Instead, the title refers to half of the six scenarios in the book being updated versions of first edition material originally published in *White Dwarf* magazine and *Restless Dead*. These three are "The Grapes of Wrath," "The Haunting Horror," and "Rough Night at the Three Feathers." Only minor changes have been made in updating them, since the rules haven't changed too much. A gnome in one adventure has been changed to a halfling, since gnomes are apparently no longer a part of the setting, and a band of the rat-men called Skaven have been changed into a rival adventuring party. Presumably the Skaven were removed because they are central to one of the new adventures and the writers didn't want them to feel overused.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

"The Grapes of Wrath" has the adventurers defending a village's harvest from evil flying skulls, a setup that could easily descend into farce. Fortunately *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* is capable of handling humor as well as horror, so it won't be a loss if played only semi-seriously. "The Haunting Horror" traps the PCs in a wizard's house that has been taken over by Chaos and has fallen out of time -- it's an old-school adventure, the closest *Plundered Vaults* comes to a dungeon, although it does have several truly creepy moments.

Then there's *Rough Night*, which blows the quality through the roof. *Rough Night* is one of the all-time classic *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* adventures. It presents a seemingly ordinary coaching inn and several groups of NPCs who are staying there on the same night; how these groups interact and how their plots play out is shown in a timeline that makes it easy for the GM to see who is doing what when, and how the PCs can get involved. By the end of the night there will be murders, blackmail attempts, and thefts, and everyone will have had a very rough night. Running this was quite a pleasant surprise; it plays even better than it reads and my group had one of our best sessions.

The three new adventures are a mixed bag. "For Love or Money" is about the search for a missing girl who is wanted by a band of outlaws, the Skaven and Chaos-worshippers. She appears to be pregnant, but in the "explosive" climax her true nature is revealed as she mutates into a new and horrific form. The plot relies on the party's employers lying to them several times and by the end they may not have figured out what was really going on. Otherwise, it's an interesting investigative piece with a good grasp of the atmosphere of *Warhammer*.

"Carrion Call" traps our heroes in the mansion of a very strange family who are in league with the Undead. There's a

very spooky, gothic tone to the whole thing, especially when the PCs must choose which member of the creepy family to trust in helping them escape, but it never quite escapes the weight of the clichés on which it is based. With a little work a good adventure could be salvaged from "Carrion Call."

Finally, "Sing for Your Supper" raises the bar for quality again. Another investigative scenario, Sing is a story of interrelated mysteries involving a chain of butchers, an opera singer, a missing daughter, and some suspicious sausages. Each scene is handily summarized with all of the key information to be gained at the top and optional information below. This chapter could be used as a template for anyone writing investigative ***Call of Cthulhu***-ish scenarios, although I would have put the NPC descriptions throughout the text rather than collecting them at the end. The climax, in which it is revealed that the sausages cause mutation and the opera singer becomes a reverse-siren, is inspired. My only worry is that the "evil sausage" motif was used in an earlier adventure, "Fear the Worst," which was released on the Internet by Hogshead Publishing.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Overall, ***Plundered Vaults*** is very worthwhile. It features two excellent adventures and several of good-to-average quality. None of them are rubbish, even if a couple could do with tinkering. With this release, Black Industries have shown that they have a firm grasp on the atmosphere of ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*** -- they've even kept the punning names -- and things look very good for future publications.

--Jody Macgregor

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Buy It Once, Buy It All!

I recently upgraded my video card in my computer, so I could tinker around with the latest generation of games.

Let me stress, momentarily, that this was by no means trivial; apparently the video card industry has gone completely bug-nuts in the past five years or so, to the point where the entire process is steeped in a morass of arcane terminology, weird methodology, and specs which -- at a certain point -- seem to break down to "\$100 per extra frame per second." If similar methodology applied to, say, the sock world, then I'm certain there'd be ultra-piped parallel-toe socks capable of supporting 16 feet at once, and which cost \$600 a pair.

Anyway, having made a decision which I seem relatively happy with now, but which I could quite possibly regret in another few days, I set out to buy a snazzy game or two.

One of those games is Valve's *Half-Life 2*, quite possibly the highest-rated first-person shooter of all time. Having decided to buy it, I discovered something else about this particular game: I had no less than five options to purchase it.

As you can imagine, having spent weeks deciphering videocardese, I was thrilled at the prospect of doing it all over again for one *game*.

Fortunately, it wasn't as bad as I'd feared. The "problem" (such as it is) is that Valve has decided on an alternate distribution method for *Half-Life 2* -- one they pushed hard. Commercial game software has traditionally been bought via software retailers, such as Electronic Boutique, Babbage's, Best Buy, Circuit City, Wal-Mart, and the like. While two of the five "versions" of *Half-Life 2* were sold in this same way as before, the other three were sold only via online download, through Valve's [Steam](#) online community/e-store/game-matchmaking service.

For those keeping track at home, the various editions are:

- Retail "regular" -- Just the game, on CD
- Retail Collector's Edition -- Comes with the game on DVD, plus the original *Half-Life*, quasi-updated to the new *Half-Life 2* engine, plus a T-shirt
- Downloadable Bronze Edition -- Just the game, for \$5 less than the regular Retail Edition
- Downloadable Silver Edition -- *Half-Life 2*, plus every game Valve has made
- Downloadable Gold Edition -- Same as the Silver Edition, plus a bunch of goodies (a hat, posters, strategy guide, and so on)

Oh, and there are three different boxes for the Regular retail edition.

Curiously, both retail editions also require online activation via Steam's registration system . . . so, by hook or by crook, you'll be dealing with their online service. That made my eventual decision (the Downloadable Gold Edition) a bit easier to swallow. (Unfortunately, the \$10 S&H charge for the extra goodies made me feel there was a bit of "bait and switch" going on.)

Now, I could easily spend a column or two on the electronic distribution aspect of this, but I'm not today . . . at least, not directly. No, what I'm most interested in today are the downloadable purchase options that permit the buyer access to the entire back catalog.

Now, even though Valve has been around for seven years, they've only released a handful of games, so it's not as outrageous a deal to get access to their backstock as, say, Electronic Art's or Origin's. Still, it was an interesting incentive -- one that pushed me over the edge to over-buy a bit. After all, if I wanted to experience, say, *Opposing Forces* (the add-on pack to the original *Half-Life*), it would probably cost me at least \$10 to track it down -- the difference in cost between the Bronze and Silver packages.

Now, I find this an interesting development in the implications for the RPG world, because I could easily see someone

in the industry doing something similar in the future. Step with me, won't you, through the doorway of an envisioned future?

Err . . . jiggle the knob a bit. It opens outward. Yeah, it's not intuitive; sorry.

<ahem> Anyway, the second edition of the successful **Füebár** RPG has just been released. You're holding the full-color hardcover in your hands, and it's beautiful. However, there's a special collector's edition, which also provides online access to all the first edition **Füebár** material, and it's only \$20 more. Sure, they're only PDFs and not "actual" books, but you never collected any of the first edition material, and this seems like a good way to catch up . . .

This example would provide an option for would-be players who don't want to feel like they're "missing out" on anything. And it should be relatively economical for the company. Since the industry has switched to a near-periodical model for most of its RPG material, most products older than three months old have nowhere near the sales as when it was new; in the same way that an issue of *Time* magazine from six months ago won't exactly fly off the shelves. (Yes, this new model causes no end of consternation for many RPG publishers . . . but that's a topic for another day.) Even worse, the periodical nature of RPGs means that there are lots of products -- since publishers want to maintain a shelf presence -- but they aren't available (since retailers aren't stocking them as much), so new fans might believe that there's this huge amount of information they would need to track down and buy -- which takes time and money. And those new fans may not want to make that investment.

But if fans were presented with a relatively low cost of entry for a long-established line, they might see it as a selling point. And there are many ways that this "low-cost backstock" option could be done besides bundling it with collector's editions. For example, a game company could sell electronic access to "years" worth of material, in the same way that you can buy seasons of television DVDs.

Of course, there are downsides; for example, fans might begin to believe that all RPGs will eventually be released in these cheap electronic formats, and forgo buying new editions -- this would prove very detrimental to publishers. (Comic publishers have faced a similar problem; the rise of trade paperbacks have trained many fans to avoid buying new issues, since the cheaper, higher-quality, ad-free alternatives will be available so quickly.)

Nevertheless, I suspect that some enterprising company might try such an experiment in the Not Too Distant Future. (Some have done so already, to a limited extent; for example, ***Path of Deception***, the first post-hiatus adventure for ***Earthdawn***, came bundled with a CD that had the main rulebook on it.) Whether or not this plan succeeds, I'm not sure I can say. But I'm all for innovative ideas -- especially those that advance the hobby and make it more accessible to new fans . . . and not just those able to spend \$600 on a pair of socks.

--Steven Marsh

Alcohol and Brewing: Ale

for GURPS

by S. E. Mortimer

This work is a continuation of the previous article ["On Inns, Taverns, and Alehouses."](#) and there is a little overlap between the two. It explores the making of ale in medieval England and concentrates on those who actually did the brewing during these times -- the alewives. There are a few references to **GURPS** and prices are listed in **GURPS** \$.

Introduction

The consumption of alcohol was ubiquitous in medieval society. Though some people counseled moderation, nobody recommended abstention -- ale was an essential part of the diet. Only the very poor drank water, which was of dubious quality, and best avoided where possible. Any woman with a cauldron and some spare cash to buy grain could brew and sell ale. All she had to do was brew a fresh batch, put out a sign (an ale-stake), and turn her home into a temporary alehouse. Unlike most industries, the aristocracy didn't control the brewing industry with monopolies, but it exacted fines from people found guilty of using faulty measures, selling weak ale, or selling at too high a price. The last article focused on alcohol once it reached the point of sale in ["Inns, Taverns and Alehouses."](#) This article focuses on the actual production of ale so that a GM will have a more realistic idea of how the various aspects of ale production could affect the medieval world, and how this might affect the PCs.

The Alewife

Contrary to popular belief, it was the women who brewed most of the ale in a medieval village. Brewing was considered to be "cooking" and hence, "women's work." Even as late as the 18th century, over 70% of licensed brewers in England were women. The majority of brewing was done in small batches by women for their own household. If a woman had a small amount of excess she would sell it to her neighbors. In times of plenty, grain might be cheap enough to enable someone to buy enough to make a larger batch for the express purpose of selling. The term "alewife" referred to a woman who brewed ale -- a "brewster." More specifically, it referred to a woman whose husband was involved in some other trade -- usually a baker or miller since they would have access to relatively cheap grain. In smaller villages there was unlikely to have been a permanent tavern. Brewsters operated from their own homes when they had a fresh batch of ale to sell. There was always several women selling ale at any one time. When one batch had been consumed, folks would move onto the next alehouse. If one wanted to become a full-time brewster, one needed a license. It was common for Justices to issue licenses to widows to sell ale from their homes so they would not be a financial burden to the parish.

Ale

Medieval ale was different to the beverages called "ale" today. It was only partially fermented -- sweeter, thicker, and quick to spoil. It only took a couple of days to make a batch, and it was only drinkable for a few days afterwards. By the second or third day it would already be beginning to spoil. There was legislation put in place to prevent ale more than four days old from being sold. As previously noted, ale was an essential part of the diet, containing loads of carbohydrates, as well as vitamins and proteins that were not present in other parts of the medieval diet. Ale was fairly expensive -- a gallon cost about one day's wages for an unskilled laborer. Even at this price, the profits from such an enterprise were slim, but it was one of the few ways a woman could legally

Beer and Hops

The main difference between ale and beer is that, with beer, hops is added to the "gruit" (see below). Hops acted as a preservative making the brew last longer, but it made the

earn hard currency.

Brewing (IQ/Average)

The techniques for using yeast and cereals to produce alcohol have been known since the Bronze Age or even earlier. A professional skill called Brewing needs to be created to encompass the skills involved in producing brewed alcohol. There are several steps involved in brewing ale: malting, mashing, sparging, and fermentation.

Malting: Malting has two purposes. First, it preserves the grain for longer term storage than is possible with the raw grain. Second, it activates enzymes in the grain that help convert starches into maltose and other sugars. Malt is rarely produced by the brewsters since the technology and tools required are totally different to those needed for brewing. Professional "maltsters" engage in this occupation. To make malt, the harvested grain is first soaked in water and allowed to sprout for a few days. To achieve this, the grain is spread out several inches high on the floor of a "raking room," often located in the attic or loft of the malt house, and moistened. The grain generates heat as it sprouts so it needs to be scooped and turned every few hours to prevent cooking and to expose all the grain to carbon dioxide in the air. After the grain has germinated, it is dried in purpose-built ovens at low to moderate heat for a few hours. Once dry, it is stored in the malt house. It takes five to seven days to produce a batch of malt. A maltster and his assistant(s) can produce four or five batches per month in each raking room. Each bushel of grain requires around ten square feet of floor space. The skill of making malt can be subsumed into the professional skill mentioned above called Brewing.

Mashing: To prepare malt for brewing, it must be broken into smaller pieces to enable water to get at the starches and sugars in the malt. Crushing was done with a mill or hand quern but the grain wasn't ground into powder -- just broken into coarse pieces. The mill stones would be adjusted so that they were a little further apart than for grinding flour. Once crushed, the various malts are added together in the required ratios, mixed with hot water to the consistency of thick porridge, and let stand for a few hours. During this stage, the enzymes in the malt complete the conversion of starches into simple sugars for the yeast to ferment. The higher the temperature of this mixture, the sweeter the brew will be, but temperatures that are too high will kill off the enzymes. Once the mixture has been let sit for a few hours the liquid is drained away from the solids. This liquid is called the "wort."

Sparging: Sparging is the technique of adding additional hot water to the malt as it is draining in order to rinse more sugar out of it. It is unlikely that sparging was performed during the Middle Ages -- it was a later innovation. If sparging was not performed then it is possible to add a second (or even a third) batch of hot water to the wort sludge to make use of any remaining sugars. This double and triple mashing doesn't seem to have occurred until the Elizabethan period, though. Without sparging or double mashing, medieval ale production was very inefficient, producing less ale per bushel of grain than more modern techniques.

Fermentation: This is the act of using yeast to convert sugars into alcohol. A large cauldron or vat is filled with the warm wort, topped up with water, but not heated. This is the main difference between modern and medieval ales (see textbox, above). At this stage "gruits" could be added. These are flavorings that might include rosemary, honey, yarrow, ginger, cinnamon, etc (but not hops -- see *Beer and Hops* textbox, above). Costmary ("alecost") was sometimes added to the gruit to increase longevity by a few days. During the fermentation stage, the cauldron is not covered. The wort is allowed to cool overnight before

drink more bitter. Hops was known by the Romans, mainly as a medicinal plant. It was known as a preservative since at least the 9th century but not as a brewing additive. In Bavaria, hops was used to brew "bier" as early as the 12th century, and beer from Flanders was well known, but it doesn't seem to have been drunk much in England until the 15th century. There was some resistance to its use since several attempts were made to ban it. One example is in 1464 when the Ale Brewers Company of London petitioned the Mayor and Alderman to prevent the use of hops. In 1493 Beer Brewers became recognized as a guild and remained separate from the Ale Brewers Guild until 1556.

Ale & Beer

As stated above, the difference between ale and beer is the addition of hops. This process involves boiling the wort after mashing -- a process that was not usually performed on medieval English ales. Boiling the wort removes a lot of the proteins in the brew, enhancing its clarity and its longevity. But the nutritional content is reduced at the same time. Because medieval ale was not

pitching the yeast. Yeast is either added from the dregs of a previous batch or an airborne "wild yeast" is allowed to infect the brew. When it is fermenting, a layer of bubbles (called "barm") forms on the top, protecting the batch from bacterial contamination. If the barm fell, it was an indication that the batch was contaminated or the yeast had died (no yeast will be available for making subsequent batches).

boiled, it had a very short shelf life (three or four days), was fairly thick and cloudy, with a low alcohol content from the partial ferment, and was more nutritious than later beers and ales.

Casking: Medieval ale was casked before it had finished fermenting, so some of the sugars had not yet been converted into alcohol. Because of this, these ales were generally sweeter and had a lower alcohol content than more modern ales and beers. A large cask was called a *barrique* and held around 60 gallons. The standard *barrel* held around 36 gallons. A smaller cask called a *kilderkin* (Dutch for "little child") held 9 gallons. The smallest cask was called a *pin* and held 4.5 gallons. A *keg* was a common cask on ships (mainly used for holding water) but its capacity varied greatly -- anywhere from 5 to 10 gallons.

Skill Roll: To brew a batch of ale, one needs to decide upon the quality of the ale to be attempted (see Ale Quality, below) and acquire the appropriate ingredients. It takes around 2 days to brew a batch of ale. At the end of the second day, a Brewing skill roll is made. Modifiers include: -2 for Good quality ale; -4 for Fine quality ale; -2 if yeast is not available (need to rely on a "wild yeast"); +2 if a thermometer is available (not in the Middle Ages). A successful roll produces 8 gallons of ale per bushel of malt -- just enough to break even with cheap ale (see Pricing, below). A typical batch of ale used about 6 bushels of malt. Every point of success raises the quantity by one quart to a maximum of 10 gallons. For example, if the roll succeeds by 2 points then 8.5 gallons is produced per bushel of malt. A failed roll results in a failed batch (and no yeast for subsequent batches). Critical failure results in some sort of toxin entering the batch. Anyone drinking this will suffer effects similar to food poisoning (see "[Rationalizing Rations](#)" for more information). Critical success raises the quality of the batch by 1 grade, e.g. Cheap ale becomes Good ale; Good ale becomes Fine ale; Fine ale becomes Very Fine ale (can sell for \$8 per gallon).

Ale Quality

There were many different grades and types of ale. Some were sweeter with a lower alcohol content, others were more bitter with a higher alcohol content. Taste was determined by the types of malt and yeast used, the fermenting temperature and duration, and the spices that were added to the gruit. For roleplaying purposes, three types of ale are adequate: cheap, good, and fine. It is possible to produce Very Fine ale but not intentionally -- a lot of factors have to be "just right" and it mostly depends on luck (modeled by a critical success on the skill roll).

Cheap Ale: Made of oat malt and barley malt at a ratio of 2/3 oats to 1/3 barley. Average price of \$24 per bushel. Cheap ale had a low alcohol content and was not as thick as better grades of ale. If one is using the Drinking and Intoxication rules on pages 439-440 of the **GURPS Basic Set**, then treat a gallon of cheap ale as four "drinks." A gallon of cheap ale sells for about one day's wages for an unskilled laborer -- around \$3.

Good Ale: Made primarily with barley with a little wheat and oats (there were many different recipes). Use the cost of malted barley as a guide for the cost of malt, i.e. \$32 per bushel. It was thicker and had a higher alcohol content than cheap ale. To make good ale, a gruit of herbs and spices is required at a cost of at least \$2 per bushel of malt. If one is using the Drinking and Intoxication rules, then treat a gallon of good ale as six "drinks." A gallon of good ale sells for \$4.

Fine Ale: The best tasting and most potent of all. In villages and small towns, fine ale was usually only brewed at the lord's manor house or by a skilled villager who sold her produce to the manor. It is likely that more malted wheat will be used in these recipes -- average price would be around \$35 per bushel. To make fine ale, a gruit of herbs and spices is required at a cost of at least \$10 per bushel of malt. If one is using the Drinking and Intoxication rules, then treat a gallon of fine ale as eight "drinks." A gallon of fine ale sells for around \$6.

Pricing

To maintain consistency, prices from ["Tilting at Windmills"](#) have been used. Malted grain is more expensive than freshly harvested grain. Here are some suggested prices in **GURPS** \$.

(one bushel = 8 gallons or 4 "pecks" of dry goods)

Grain (one bushel)	Weight	Cost
Oats	32 lbs	\$14
Barley	48 lbs	\$25
Wheat	60 lbs	\$30

Oats -- malted	25 lbs	\$20
Barley -- malted	38 lbs	\$32
Wheat -- malted	50 lbs	\$38

Drink (1 Gallon)	Weight	Cost	Alcohol*	Notes
Ale, cheap	8 lbs	\$3	4 drinks	sours after 2 days
Ale, good	8 lbs	\$4	6 drinks	sours after 3 days
Ale, fine	8 lbs	\$6	8 drinks	sours after 3 days

*Alcohol -- the number of "drinks" per gallon. E.g. 1 gallon of fine ale contains 8 drinks (see **GURPS Basic Set**, pages 439-440).

A bushel of malt yields between 8 and 10 gallons of ale. A typical batch of cheap ale would consist of 4 bushels of malted oats and 2 bushels of malted barley at a cost of \$144 (80 + 64), producing 48 to 60 gallons of ale. To break even, each gallon of ale needs to sell for between \$2.40 and \$3. As stated above, a gallon of cheap ale sold for around \$3, so the brewster would barely break even if she produced only 48 gallons from a batch. If she tried to water it down, she risked being fined for selling substandard ale. If she was skilled and worked hard she could make and sell two batches or 120 gallons of ale per week, giving a profit of \$72 per week. Allowing for overheads and taxes, she might clear \$150-\$200 per month. This is a reasonable living -- better than a struggling craftsman.

Note that the actual price of grain, especially wheat, fluctuated greatly even in supposedly economically stable times. Prices even fluctuated during the same year, being cheapest just after harvest, and gradually getting more expensive, until peaking just before the following harvest. The above suggested prices are a rough average, so prices would be more expensive than those suggested just before harvest and less expensive just after harvest. If the price of ale was fixed by legislation (which it usually was), then it is possible for a woman to lose money on a batch if she purchased malt at the wrong time of the year.

The Mirror Dance

Playing Twins in *GURPS*

By Tim Emrick

"I was just about to mail a letter to my evil twin . . ."

-- "Weird Al" Yankovic, "Everything You Know Is Wrong"

Twins present a mystery that has fascinated mankind for ages, inspiring characters from early myths and classic literature through TV dramas and gaming fiction. They also present a unique opportunity -- and challenge -- for gamers wanting unusual characters.

Twins are probably most fun when run in tandem by two players who already have some rapport with each other. Character creation should be a joint effort, in order to maximize the illusion of a shared history. The twins' separate identities should be played up just as much as the traits they have in common -- "carbon copy" twins are unrealistic, and likely to get boring quickly. After all, twins define themselves by their differences, no matter how much others may emphasize their sameness. However, playing off of that closeness is where much of the fun lies with twin characters. The satisfaction of being so close to another being, the perverse joy of unnerving others through their appearance and behavior, and the justification for exotic joint powers are just a few of the possible perks to playing twins.

With the new *Fourth Edition*, building **GURPS** characters defined by twinhood -- whether their link is mundane or superhuman -- becomes even easier. This article covers some of the folklore of twins and how to represent it in **GURPS** terms. Clones, doppelgangers, doubles, and other twin-like phenomena are beyond the scope of this discussion; **GURPS Monsters**, **GURPS Time Travel**, and other books devote entire sections to those subjects.

Growing Up Double

Twins, especially identical pairs, tend to be easy and friendly with each other, if not deeply dependent, with a level of empathy that non-twins frequently find uncanny. While other close pairs, such as non-twin siblings and spouses, can develop a high degree of rapport, twins have an advantage over adult friendships: a lifetime growing up together. Twins seem to be aware of their twins even when not consciously thinking about them, and frequently talk about their twins, even in casual conversation. Some even invent a unique language between themselves. However, the ideas that twins are always the best of friends, or possess true ESP, are not supported by modern research.

To represent a realistic "twin bond," apply the Accessibility limitation, "Only with Twin, -40%," to Empathy or Sensitive. The twins may also have one or more of the following traits: Chummy or Congenial, Higher Purpose (Defend Twin), Language ("Twin Language," Spoken Only), Mistaken Identity, Phobia (Being Alone), and Sense of Duty (Twin). If one twin is an NPC, Ally and/or Dependent may be appropriate for the other. Twins need not be identical to benefit from this kind of relationship; the Brothers Majere of *Dragonlance* fame are nearly polar opposites in physique, temperament, and aptitude, but have a unique understanding of, and dependency on, each other.

While twins trading places is a plot device in stories such as *The Parent Trap*, people familiar with a given sets of twins will usually be able to tell them apart. To successfully impersonate one's own twin requires checks against Acting, Disguise, and Mimicry (Speech). The Impersonation technique is invaluable for twins that make a habit of switching roles. Identical twins might get a +1 or higher situational modifier to these checks.

To represent in-game knowledge of the science or folklore associated with twins, use one or more of the following skills: Biology, Expert Skill (Psionics), Occultism, Psychology, or Thaumatology. With GM permission, "gemellology," the study of twins, would be an appropriate optional specialization for Biology and perhaps other skills.

In fiction and games, of course, twins need not be limited by strict reality -- and rarely are. The following sections cover more options for creating twins, many of them only appropriate to cinematic or paranormal campaigns.

Twin Taboos

Many "primitive" cultures view the birth of twins as a supernatural event. In Western Africa, where the incidence of twins is nearly twice that of the US, some tribes view twins as abominations against nature, so kill them at birth and either exile or slay the mother as well. Others revere twins as divine -- though dangerous -- beings, treating them (and their parents) with great respect so that the community will benefit from their power, rather than incurring the twins' wrath. Depending on the dominant taboo, being a twin, or the parent of a twin, may result in either Social Regard or Social Stigma.

Other folklore claims that twins will always be rivals, or even that one twin is always good, one evil. An Enemy with the Evil Twin option need not be a literal twin, but that link makes the relationship far more personal. An arch-enemy who is also a sibling shares that much more history with the hero, and has unique insight into what makes his foe tick. Eliminating a troublesome twin could be complicated by prohibitions against killing people of the twin's station (*The Man in the Iron Mask*), or slaying any kinsman (ancient Greece).

Twins are also about twice as likely to be left-handed as non-twins. Given the "sinister" connotations of "wrong"-handedness, being a lefty twin simply doubles the trouble, regardless of the character's true nature.

My Brother, The Demigod

Twins are common in the mythology of many cultures, from the creator/destroyer brothers of Iroquois legend, to the twin sun/moon heroes of Mayan myth, to the multiple generations of twin gods of Egyptian cosmology. However, Greek mythology has perhaps the most famous -- and most gameable -- twin pairs.

Many Greek heroes are demigods: the immortal offspring of a god and a mortal. Typically, they have a twin sired by the mother's husband, and therefore mortal. In these pairs, the demigod becomes the dominant hero, while the mortal twin tends to fade into obscurity. The most extreme disparity is between Heracles and Iphicles. The former was granted full divine status after death, while the latter would have been forgotten entirely if not for his famous brother -- and his son Iolaus, who became that twin's favorite companion.

Leto's four egg-born children form a unique set of twins: two of each sex; two demigods (Pollux and Helen) and two mortals (Castor and Clytemnestra). Castor and Pollux (collectively known as the Dioscuri, or Sons of Zeus) were unusual among Greek twins for being well-matched in ability and never at odds with each other. Upon Castor's death, Pollux petitioned Zeus to revoke his immortality so that they could remain together. In an unprecedented boon, Zeus allowed them to share that gift, dwelling half the time in Olympus, half in Hades. (However, sources disagree on whether the twins dwelled in the same place at the same time, or alternated.)

The twin motif is so widespread in Greek myth that some scholars insist demigod heroes could not be only children. For example, Theseus is one of the few major semi-divine heroes with no known twin. Was his twin lost to history? Was his buddy Peirithous actually his twin but that blood relationship later forgotten? Or has a darker truth been obscured here?

Twins built on the Greek model will usually be Allies, though not necessarily frequent ones. In this case, the lesser twin will also be his brother's Dependent. Occasionally, they may become Enemies instead, as with the Latin Romulus and Remus, or the Biblical Jacob and Esau. (Perhaps Iphicles had a hand in assigning Heracles his Labors, in order to dispose of his glory hound twin?) In nearly all cases, Destiny is highly appropriate, whether for good or ill.

To create twins who share a supernatural gift on a set schedule, apply a -40% Accessibility limitation to represent only having use of the ability about half the time. For something as powerful as the Dioscuri's shared immortality, apply the limitation to Supernatural Durability, Unkillable, or similar traits, and spend full points on an Extra Life in case one

twin is killed on a "mortal" day.

One Mind, Two Bodies

Some cultures believe that twins share a single soul. Among the Yoruba, if one twin dies, the survivor must carry a fetish item representing the dead twin in order to maintain his own health and magical powers. In a realistic game, this requirement is simply cultural color, or a prerequisite to keeping any social advantages for being a twin. If magic is real, this fetish could represent a genuine Dependency.

In a setting with psionics or magic, the easiest way to represent a shared soul or mind is to apply advantages such as Mind Reading and Telesend (both with the limitation, "Only with Twin, -40%"), Mindlink, Special Rapport, and possibly Possession. (Any of these would make a literal Evil Twin especially annoying.) Besides the disadvantages already mentioned under "Growing Up Double," Addiction (Telepathy) is appropriate. "Twin Causes No Penalties" would be a suitable +20% enhancement for Solitary Magery or -20% limitation for Supersensitive.

"Wonder Twin Powers, Activate!"

Some fictional twins are fully distinct individuals, but require the other's presence to activate an inborn power. This power need not be identical, as in the case of Zan and Jayna, or fantasy twins who have differently-limited Magery. Merely requiring the twin's presence would be a -10% Trigger limitation, while requiring both twins to concentrate on the same power at once would be -40%. Preparation Required may also be appropriate (though the Wonder Twins' Morph powers would have Reduced Time instead).

Stranger Twins

Conjoined twins are identical, same-sex twins who did not separate completely when the original embryo split. They may be linked by a small piece of skin, or may share significant fractions of their bodies. The most famous examples were Chang and Eng Bunker, "the original Siamese twins." These brothers learned to row a boat, play shuttlecock, and perform other tasks in tandem; married a pair of sisters and sired numerous children; and died in their 60s within an hour of each other. In a RPG, the GM must decide whether conjoined twins should be portrayed by the same or different players, or to make one twin a NPC. Perhaps the easiest way to represent them mechanically in **GURPS** is with a single stat block, using Compartmentalized Mind for the separate personalities, and Extra Heads, Extra Legs, etc., to model the physical form. Most will have low DX and/or Lameness due to the awkward configuration of their limbs, and some may even be Semi-Upright or Horizontal. All will have some level of Distinctive Features or Unnatural Features, depending on how much their shape deviates from the two-body norm. In any society that marginalizes them as "freaks," conjoined twins will have a Social Stigma (Minority, Second-Class Citizen, or even Valuable Property).

In Dumas's novel *The Corsican Brothers*, separated Siamese twins retained a psychic bond easily represented by Special Rapport. However, in parodies of the tale, this bond has been altered so that instead of merely knowing when the other was hurt, the injury itself was transferred. In **GURPS**, this is a special case of an Ally with the Sympathy limitation. If both twins are affected equally, use Sympathy as written. If all damage and other effects are transferred to the other twin, count this as a Special Abilities enhancement. This latter version needs to be carefully managed by the GM to insure that one twin does not simply abuse the other as a damage sink.

Chimeras are formed when twins fuse in the womb to create a single body that (unlike conjoined twins) seems to be normal on the macro level. This mixed genetic make-up may cause problems such as a false negative on a paternity test, identification of a crash victim as two separate people, and confusion of other forensic evidence (as dramatized in the "Bloodlines" episode of *CSI*). A realistic chimera could qualify for Zeroed with the Unreliable limitation -- until his condition is exposed. Chimeras are usually same-sex twins, but the rare male-female unions seem to be responsible for a small percentage of intersexed individuals (formerly called hermaphrodites).

In a supernatural game, chimerism may result in two distinct minds operating within one body. Possible results include

Split Personality, Compartmentalized Mind, or Possession (Parasitic, single Puppet Only). Occasionally, an "unborn twin" is removed but reappears as a separate entity, a sort of Evil Twin, as in Stephen King's *The Dark Half*.

Time of the Twins

Whether twinhood is used merely as a hook for role-playing, or becomes the basis for a whole suite of bizarre supernatural powers, this unique relationship is a rich mine of ideas for games. Build these special pairs with care, then watch the magical mirror dance of their lives unfold . . .

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A *Killer* Miscellany

by Loki Carbis

This article contains a variety of add-ons and alternatives to the standard *Killer* rules. Each new section is presented in the same order as it appears in the rule book.

Alternate Points Systems

(This section expands on p. 13 of the *Killer* rules.)

Trophy Games

A Trophy Game is basically the same as any other game, except that killers are required to prove their kills by taking trophy. The nature of the trophy should be specified in the contract at the start of the game -- it's usually a body part of some description, such as a finger, eye, ear or scalp.

At the start of the game, each player is issued a piece of paper with the word "Trophy" written on it. If a player is killed, they are required to provide their killer with it, to allow them to prove the kill. Any kill in which a trophy is taken is worth bonus points, over and above the normal points for a successful kill -- a 50% bonus on whatever the normal point award for a kill is about right.

Naturally, the need to take a trophy will rule out certain types of kills -- some are too disfiguring (bombs or fire, for example), while others are too distant (letter bombs, some poisons) -- a killer must be physically present to take a trophy. Lenient GMs may allow killers to stretch this point if they are the first person to find the victim's "corpse."

It is generally inadvisable to combine the trophy rules with the rules on wounding, but it can be done -- killers could then take trophies off any target they managed to immobilize, which would usually involved the use of either traps or accomplices. However, it may be advisable for the GM to find out just how much of a fan of *Reservoir Dogs* each player is before deciding to go ahead with these rules.

Cannibalism Games

As with a trophy game, a cannibalism game offers a way to gain extra points for one's kills, but at the cost of having certain limitations applied. The idea is based on that of one common version of cannibalism, in which certain parts of an enemy's body (typically the heart or brain) are consumed in order to assimilate that enemy's traits. In this variant for killer, it is not traits but points that are assimilated.

Upon a successful kill, a killer may opt to "eat" his victim. In doing so, he gains half the current point score of their victim, and the corresponding amount is removed from the victim's tally. (If more than one player shares the kill -- in a team game, for example -- then the points are divided equally between them, rounding down.) For this reason, it is better if each player starts the scenario with a certain number of points, such as 20 or 50 (depending on how high scoring the game is likely to be).

As with trophy games, cannibalism requires that the victim be in an edible condition. This rules out several popular weapons, such as bombs and poisons . . . anything that leaves the body either too disintegrated or too tainted for "eating."

Primitive Weapons

Flying Discs -- Cloth (p. 18, Class B)

Several varieties of cloth flying disc are also available -- these generally consist of a cloth ring, usually weighted (although lightly) with a piece of cloth sown to it. In addition to working just as well as any other sort of flying disc, they have three advantages. First, they are generally softer and hurt less to be hit with; second, they are easily concealable when one is trying not to arouse suspicion; and third, at the GM's option, they can also be used to simulate the effects of a bola, immobilizing but not harming those they strike.

Modern Weapons

Pistols (pp22-26)

Infra-Red Guns (Class A)

These are available in a variety of brands, of which the best known is probably Lazer-Tag. They work on the same principle as a remote control -- shooting a beam of infrared radiation at other players, who wear targets with built in sensors. It's highly unlikely that a player wearing a full target harness will be even remotely inconspicuous (the harnesses tend to have flashing red lights and make loud noises when a "hit" is recorded). On the other hand, this does mean you're unlikely to be mistaken for someone using a real gun.

An added plus of these guns is that they are frequently programmable, with the ability to have wounds or kills for different targets, and multiple lives should the GM wish to allow such.

Although these guns are generally modeled on rifles in shape, their range is more like that of a pistol, hence their placement here.

Poisons

Envelope Toxin (p41, Class A)

Given that new security precautions mean that any envelope filled with a fine powder is likely to be assumed to carry anthrax or other infectious diseases -- and that law enforcement authorities are notably unfond of the "it was just a prank" defense -- stick to the use of confetti or some similar obviously harmless substance when using this poison. Or just write the word "poison," or better yet "poison (not actual poison, game use only)" on a slip of paper inside the envelope.

Syringes (Class B through D)

A syringe is basically equivalent to a knife, only less damaging. Nonetheless, if you can stab someone with one, you can kill or wound them (GM's call -- generally it will depend on what part of the body you stabbed). But what makes them lethal is their payloads.

Syringes are perfect for administering drugs or poisons, or even a meme (see below) encoded into RNA. But they can be deadly if you're not careful with them: real syringes are Class D weapons -- do not use them in the game under any circumstances. A toy syringe (Class C, and readily available in shops, although you may have to buy a whole doctor's kit to get one) is better, but best of all is a simple piece of plastic tube marked "SYRINGE" (Class B). Under no circumstance should you place any physical substance in your simulated syringes -- even with a toy, it's possible you might break the skin of your victim and poison or infect them.

Obviously, use of a syringe requires extreme proximity -- which usually means that the target be either ambushed or immobilised to allow time to administer the contents.

In trophy games, syringes might also be used to extract substances from the bodies of players if the scenario permits it.

Futuristic Weapons

Memes

Memes should be considered basically equivalent to Curses (**Killer** rules, pp. 47-48) in their effects, for convenience sake. However, generally, a meme will take longer to wear off than a curse would. Ideally, a Meme should have a sliding effect, starting off at a particular level and dropping off by one level each day. Thus, a meme of trivial effect would last only one day, but a meme of catastrophic effect would slowly weaken over the course of four days. Memes should be fantastically expensive -- three or four times the cost of the equivalent curse. Ideally, they should be the most expensive weapon in the game.

Scenarios

Using Trophy rules with pre-existing **Killer** Scenarios

The Trophy rules will work well with any of the scenarios in the book, excepting those which already use variations on the idea. This includes "The Hidden Prize," "The Bomb Builders," and "The Couriers." They will also work with the rules presented in "[With Friends Like These](#)" rules, and very well indeed with the "[Andrew Season!](#)" rules (both from *Pyramid*).

Using Cannibalism rules with pre-existing **Killer** Scenarios

The Cannibalism rules can also work well with most of the scenarios in the book, excepting those which already use variations on the idea. This includes "Vampires" and "Thing From Outer Space." Whether or not they are appropriate to the setting is another question -- they clearly don't fit with "Chicago 1920" (because they're wrong for the setting) or with "The Mad Killer" (because only one player, the killer, would benefit from them). Again, they can work with the "House Killer" or "Andrew Season!" rules.

Cowboys and Indians

One of the classics, but rarely used in **Killer** until now, the Cowboys and Indians scenario uses the Trophy scoring system. Players are divided into two teams, one consisting of Cowboys, one of Indians. Cowboys have access chiefly to modern weapons, and may also have the advantage of fortifications (a playground or other easily defined area can be selected as a "fort"), while Indians are mostly limited to hand weapons. Although the cowboys have an almost overwhelming technological advantage, they do have two serious disadvantages. First, they *must* guard their fort -- even if some cowboys survive, the taking of the fort means that the Indians have won, regardless of individual player scores. (If the GM wishes, a score -- a substantial one, perhaps ten times the value of a kill -- may be awarded for taking the fort instead.) Second, the Indians have the option of scalping any cowboy they immobilize or kill, thus giving them the opportunity to score extra points as per the trophy rules.

If the players wish, it is possible to play this scenario with cowboys and Indians on both sides -- a minor recreation of the French and Indian War (as seen in *The Last of the Mohicans*), in which some players are the French or their Indian allies, and some players are the British or their Indian allies. If there are sufficient players for it, the GM may wish to create a third team entirely of Indians, opposing both the other teams.

DNAliens

Hundreds of years into the future, a transhuman revolution has occurred. Order has collapsed, and the hundreds of sub-species humanity has fragmented into thanks to advanced genetic engineering now prey upon each other. A genetic

plague stalks humanity, and the only way to create a cure is to gather samples of as many different types of engineered DNA as possible in the same body. Whoever has the most DNA will be the ultimate evolved human, and best able to resist the disease.

This is a futuristic scenario using the cannibalism rules, but not one in which actual eating is necessary. To score at all, a player must paralyze or immobilise their opponent, then extract their DNA with a syringe. Understandably, this is a game which favours ambush tactics and traps. It's very important to recall that they must do both, in order, or neither works. The third and final stage is that they must then inject the stolen DNA into their own bodies. If a syringe of DNA is stolen before it is injected, the thief can then inject it themselves, gaining the points for the DNA. GM's may wish to enforce a time limit after which the DNA may no longer be injected -- the shorter this is, the more difficult the task of the attacker becomes.

Remember that DNA is cumulative -- if a player steals the DNA of another player who has already stolen the DNA of two others, he effectively gains all three sets of DNA. Thus, the scenario has two alternate victory conditions -- either the player with the most points or the player with the most other players' DNA wins. (Whichever you're using, the other can be used as a tie-breaker). For either victory condition, if there is only one player left standing but he or she did not succeed in getting every DNA sample, they are the default winner.

There are a number of variants to this scenario:

1. **No one dies:** Since there's no actual need for anyone to die in order to have their DNA extracted, this means that a player might well survive the process. Players who survive are assumed to still have all their own DNA and whatever DNA they have previously captured. This variant tends to lead to deal-making, and the inevitable betrayals that follow deal-making in *Killer*.
2. **Entropy:** In one of life's little ironies, the DNA stealing process makes its victims vulnerable to the genetic plague. A player whose DNA is stolen will die in 24 hours -- unless they can steal someone else's DNA to "stabilize" their condition. A particularly cruel GM can rule that this is cumulative -- each time a player's DNA is stolen, the clock starts ticking, until finally their time runs out. In such a case, each player will need to have a stopwatch, set to count down from 24 hours.
3. **Blood is life:** Perhaps DNA grants some special abilities. In keeping with the game's setting, these might be poison glands (that express through the nails or teeth), hypnotic stares, or anything else that's relatively minor, and simulates an existing weapon in *Killer*.
4. **Memetic engineering:** if the Meme rules are also used, the most common sort of meme will probably be one that programs a player to hunt a particular other player. In this case, a player must nominate beforehand whether or not a particular syringe attack also implants a meme in the victim.

Headhunters

High in the mountainous jungles of New Guinea, life is largely unchanged from before the white man came. Here, two ancient tribes in neighboring valleys fight a bloody and unending war over possession of the land between. And both these tribes practise the venerable traditions of beheading their victims and devouring their hearts.

The Headhunters scenario is a team scenario that combines the use of both the trophy rules and the cannibalism rules. It's quite a deadly game, so it's best if players are allowed to rejoin as a new character each time they get killed, although they should be made to wait until the second day following before they can. The GM should set either a time limit to the game, or a maximum number of resurrections (or both, if the number of players is particularly large), and for maximum chaos, resurrected players can swell the ranks of the opposing team (or, if there are three or more teams, the team responsible for their death).

Pyramid Review

Pie Shop: A Role-Playing Game by Mr. Toad

Written & Published by [Mr. Toad](#)

Illustrated by John Tenniel

68-page Saddlestitched black & white book; \$20.00

Pie Shop: A Role-Playing Game by Mr. Toad is another entry in the roleplaying genre of the "Nasty." This is best typified by the old Hogshead Publishing's New Style games, *Violence: The RPG of Egregious Bloodshed* and *Puppetland/Powerkill*. *Pie Shop* though, is not the outrageously satirical rant upon the style of play espoused by the world's leading RPG that is *Violence*, but more the social commentary of *Puppetland/Powerkill* that forces us to confront the casually violent nature of our actions in so many games.

Right from the out, *Pie Shop* gets to its point. It is a roleplaying game that descends into the hobby's equivalent of the septic tank by asking you to roleplay a serial killer. Not a mere killer with a cause or a conscience, but a sick individual driven to commit murder for often the most spurious, though no less compelling of reasons. And while guilty of such acts, such a killer does not feel the guilt of his act. In true *La Femme Nikita*-style, the killer has been caught, convicted, and locked away. Which is where they found him. Since he is not so well-known, they (whomever they are) have offered him a deal, which he accepted and was set free to kill again. Not for himself, but whenever he receives a telephone call that will give the instructions and a target. And that, is all there is to *Pie Shop*.

Characters in *Pie Shop* -- or rather killers, since there is no other option -- are defined by 13 attributes, each on a scale from -3 to +3, with 0 being the average. These attributes are only suggestions and the GM can pick and choose the ones that he wants to include in his game. Skills are broadly defined and have to be purchased at level 0 before they can be raised up to 12 or more. Skill level costs rise sharply the higher the desired value. All killers begin the game with defaults of 0 in four skills: Dodge, Slice & Dice (sharp weapons), Sticks & Stones (blunt weapons), Unarmed Combat, and Medicine. Also available is a selection of advantages and disadvantages; some are quite normal or mundane, such as "Cool Under Pressure," "Rich," or "Phobia." Others relate to the character's penchant for murder: "Look Innocent & Trustworthy," "Faint" (. . . at the sight of blood), "Must Always Be Planning or Executing A Kill," and so on.

Besides spending the 130 points on various aspects of the character, a player needs to define his killer's *raison d'être*. This comprises his favored Target (women, children, freaks & weirdoes, corporate suits, mobile phone users, and so on), the Emotion felt after a kill (from nothing to sexual pleasure and "Jesus told me"), and Methodology Quirks. These are the conditions or rituals that must be fulfilled before a kill can "count." Suggestions include eating part of the victim, killing in a particular place or with a preferred implement, the need for the victim to feel fear, or to have committed a specific task. Extra character points can be gained for taking extra Methodology Quirks.

To do anything in *Pie Shop*, a player rolls a d12 and hopes to get 10 or more, including an appropriate attribute and skill. Combat involves the same roll, but adds further complexities. For starters, the initiative winner is heavily favored, as only he can attack in that round and his victim has the choice of either dodging or fleeing. Further, any damage inflicted reduces a victim's initiative modifier, thus making it increasingly difficult for them to fight back.

Damage is well, deadly. Weapons inflict hits measured in Tally marks, five of which translate into a wound that penalizes all actions. Two or more wounds force a check to remain conscious. Gunshots automatically inflict wounds, and like slashing damage also causes bleeding. Continued bleeding will also force consciousness checks, but eventually neither unconsciousness nor death is unavoidable. An optional rule allows for deadlier hits to the head and as to

healing, it is a very slow process unless the killer wants to answer some very awkward questions at the hospital.

The campaign notes, once past blatantly pointing out that ***Pie Shop*** is not suited to campaign play, suggest a few ideas as to how to turn it into an actual RPG. Besides discussing the place of women in a game like ***Pie Shop***, it suggests that killers must kill at least once or twice a year. Once he receives that phone call, a killer must do everything to fulfill his compulsion. One or two players will take the roles of the killers, while the others should those roles normally filled by NPCs -- victims, paramedics, members of a studio audience, and so on. Several situations are given to support this set-up, from having the killer appear on a chat show to promote his new book to sessions with his counselor or psychologist.

The production values for ***Pie Shop*** are decent enough and the book is well-written. In places, the tone is mockingly snide and the strong language always aimed the game's wannabe player. In the full edition of the game the author adds further quotes from Lewis Carol's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that it murderously subverts along with several of John Tenniel's illustrations from the books. The Preview Edition of ***Pie Shop*** lacks these additions.

To extend the "special" appeal of the game, or at least the joke, the author also includes a new Prestige Class compatible with the OGL. In a chapter entitled "Long Pig Truffles," he presents the 20-level Serial Killer Prestige Class. Taking this class grants a character "Dubious Destiny," preventing further levels in any other class. Alignment is sent askew, while Chaos and Evil remain unchanged, Lawful becomes "Structured," and Good becomes "Well-Meaning." This more modern adjustment effectively enables any character to take the Prestige Class and not lose the benefits of his class, even a Paladin! The class steps out of the game and into the real world with the ability, "Happy Dance." Literally, it allows a player whose character reaches third level to dance around a table, spill everyone's drinks, and not suffer the consequences. Just the once, though. That is, until the 20th level when the player gets "Really Happy Dance."

On one level the author of ***Pie Shop*** could be accused of homophobia, misogyny, and so on. But while the book includes such "-isms," they are intended as the opinions and beliefs of the killers, not those of the author. More accurately, the game could be accused of being anti-human, and while the killers certainly are, the author looked at least perfectly normal -- for a gamer, that is. Rather, it is a very humanist game, because it is designed as an endurance test, to be played -- if at all -- until sickened as every little detail is played out in the gory, painstaking minutiae that the game and author demands. More so than any other than any other RPG, there are no winners in ***Pie Shop***. Playing is losing. It should sicken as much as should reading ***Pie Shop***.

Ultimately it is difficult to see the point of ***Pie Shop*** and it would be at best trite to point out its awful pointlessness. Which is not to say that it is badly done, and unlike some other titles in the genre it is not actually offensive. The question is, is ***Pie Shop*** playable or useful at all? Perhaps in games where serial killers play a significant role, such as ***SLA Industries***, but even then only for a session or two. As to playing the game, see above.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Pyramid Pick

Heroes of Battle (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by David Noonan, Will McDermott, & Stephen Schubert

Edited by John D. Rateliff & Gary Sarli

Art by David Hudnut, Wayne England, Doug Kovacs, Chuck Lukacs, Roberto Marchesi, Mark Nelson, Eric Polak, Wayne Reynolds, Franz Vohwinkel, & Todd Gamble

160-page full-color hardcover; \$29.95

All too often, Wizards of the Coast puts out *d20 System* material that gives you a lot of lists and not much setting advice, and when they do slip some of the latter in on you, precious little of it is workable or inspiring. *Heroes of Battle* not only provides both the mechanics and the RPG feel the story demands, but weaves them together into a beautiful tapestry.

Rules for mass combat are nothing new, even in roleplaying, but this book isn't so much about sparing the DM the effort of rolling for thousands of combatants as keeping the battlefields interesting for the characters. You won't find complex tables or extensive formulae for figuring out which side loses what. It's mostly about the characters and their actions . . . after all, the skirmishes in this book *are* the adventures. How do you keep them alive? How do you assign experience (because, let's face it, this time they had help)? How far can you drag the mages before they're tapped on spells, and can they reasonably rest to get more? It's a war, and you can't just hold things up because they're hurting . . . or can you?

New classes and feats exist to beef up your battlefield prowess, but more importantly you get teamwork benefits when you learn to work together. You've got all those people; surely the lot of you can slowly close in on an invisible enemy. The archer next to you shot his arrow too high, and the next attack that row makes will learn from it and improve. Your successes aren't limited to XP. Now you can get promotions or medals, and influence your hero's advancement and even the flow of battle with victory and recognition points. Morale is back -- drive your frightened foes off. The commander auras from the miniatures game have been transplanted, so you inspire those about you to make more attacks or stand firm against the hordes of the undead.

The DM's advice . . . they've promised it before, but this time the Wizards come through. It may look like a mess from this side of the screen, but on the ref's side it's all flowcharts and boxes (don't panic -- they're so confident they have the system down, they break down *how long each segment will take you to write out*), quick and easy, with examples and sample missions to send PCs on. And if they diverge, not a problem. That's just what the book is there for. The tips are real, not just vague hand waves meant to gloss over the tough stuff. It's actual stuff you can actually use.

How does a siege engine work? There's stuff about the physics of the combat zone, and since someone has to run it, there are armies listed in standardized formats. Everything from the ballistae to the banners can be magical if you want it to be. Spells are bigger, as are the prestige classes. Bring daylight to a close faster, or turn an entire battlefield against the bad guys. Play a medic and tend to the sick, or be a dread commando, getting behind the enemy when and where he least expects it and making *him* sick. And even before you reach the big guns, there's advice on how to use

individuals -- your rogue will have something to do even on the battleground.

The artwork may be done by the same crew, but this time it doesn't have the same feel. The pictures have a sense of scale, a feel of the epic about them. They know they're dealing with massive, world-changing events, and the illustrations reflect that. They're deep and panoramic, both on the cover and inside. About the only physical complaint about the book is it's a little stiff to open. But when you get it open . . .

Wizards of the Coast's writing feels a little impersonal sometimes, as if they're afraid adding a little color or character to their text will make it seem less like a rulebook. Not here. It's an epic book that makes your character epic as well. The reading flows smoothly, the examples are lively, and you know there are real people toiling away behind the keyboard to make it come together. And when they finished . . . they stopped. No filler here, no explosive lists of monsters and templates and NPCs, oh my. Everything is useful, everything is solid and real, and everything in ***Heroes of Battle*** makes sure you're getting your money's worth when you crack the jacket. It's a marvelous marriage of story and mechanics, and shows what made them the big guns in the industry.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Loch A Rolling Stone: The Stone of Destiny

*"Unless the fates are faithless found
And prophets' voice be vain,
Where'er this monument is found
The Scottish race shall reign."*

-- attributed to King Kenneth I MacAlpin (Sir Walter Scott trans.)

That prophetic quote, after the fashion of Celtic mythography, is also attributed to St. Patrick, St. Columba, and (creepily enough) an oracular voice from the very monument it purports to describe. The "monument" in question is the Stone of Destiny, also known as the Stone of Scone or the Coronation Stone, although its precise identity, as we shall see, is pleasantly bisociated. The story, in slightly less poetic form, averages out as follows: Once upon a time, on the royal hill of Tara in Ireland, rested a magical Stone, the Lia Fail. The kings of Ireland were crowned on this stone, which would cry out when touched by the rightful high king. Around 500 A.D., Fergus Mac Erc, brother of Murdoc Mac Erc, the High King of Ireland, took this Stone with him on his invasion of Britain for his eventual crowning as King of Dalriada, the Irish-occupied section of northern Britain. (Fergus' followers, the Scoti, gave their name to the whole northern kingdom.) The kings of the Scoti were crowned on that Stone for centuries, as per the prophecy. Around 843 A.D., the nobly-named King Kenneth I moved it from the old Dalriadan royal city Dunkeld to Scone in Perthshire, where it stayed until King Edward I looted it on his invasion of Scotland in 1296 and carted it off to Westminster Abbey. The Kings of England have been crowned on the Stone ever since -- and for a while there, the Kings of England were Scottish, too.

"[T]he Bishop of St. Andrew's, the others assisting him, consecrated his king, the king himself sitting, as was proper, upon the regal Chair --that is, the Stone -- and the earls and other nobles placing vestments under his feet with bent knees, before the Stone. This Stone is reverently preserved in that monastery for the consecration of kings of Scotland; nor were any of the kings in wont to reign anywhere in Scotland, unless they had, on receiving the name of king, first sat upon this royal Stone in Scone, which was constituted by ancient kings . . ."

-- John of Fordun, *Scotichronicon*

Interestingly enough, the Stone of Destiny actually only enters the historical record with its theft from Scotland. Edward's royal records note its confiscation, and the first histories of Scotland to mention it were composed by Scottish courtiers petitioning the Pope to make Edward give it (and, to be sure, the rest of Scotland) back to the Scots. The contemporary seals depicting the crowning of Scottish kings show only ornately carved thrones (of the sort that Edward may also have looted from Scone or Edinburgh), and the first ever mention of a Scottish king being crowned on it was that of an English chronicler, William of Rishanger, around 1325. Roughly contemporaneously, one Robert of Gloucester, another Englishman, mentions the legend that the Irish "broghte into Scotland a whyte marble ston . . . ordeyned for hure kyng, whan he coroned wer." But we can be fairly sure that the Stone had some sort of historical royal resonance, or King Edward would hardly have bothered to drag it all the way back to London. The role of the Lia Fail is relatively well-attested in Irish chronicles, as is that of the Zasliai Stone of Lithuania or the Mora Stone of Sweden, or the old Saxon King's Stone currently resting in obscurity in Kingston-on-Thames. But the only thing we know for sure about the Stone is that it is a 336-pound block of pinkish-yellow Perthshire sandstone, measuring 26" × 16" × 11", and that since 1996, it has been sitting in Edinburgh Castle, to which spot John Major returned it on the 700th anniversary of Edward's desecration.

*"So he quarried a stane o' the very same stuff
And he dressed it all up till it looked like enough
Then he sent for the press and announced that the stane
Had been found and returned tae Westminster again."*

-- Johnny McEvoy, "The Wee Magic Stane"

Except that we don't know that, either. It seems that on Christmas Day, 1950, a trio of energetic Scots students stole the Stone out of Westminster Abbey and hid it in the workshop of a man whose talents included making duplicate

Stones for area heritage sites. Although a Stone reappeared at Arbroath Abbey on April 11, 1951 (on which Queen Elizabeth II was duly crowned at Westminster two years later) a long-standing rumor has it that this was a duplicate Stone made by one or another band of merry Scots pranksters. Which assumes, of course, that the monks of Scone Abbey turned the real Stone over to Edward in the first place -- similar Scottish legend has it that they hid the Stone and gave Edward the cover off their cess-pit. Which doesn't even begin to address the various peregrinations of the Stone between the Macdonalds and the Campbells, any of whom are supposed to have swapped out the real Stone for their own forgeries. The Stone of Destiny has been spotted in Iona, Finlaggan, Islay, Skye (where Bonnie Prince Charlie was supposedly crowned on it), Melrose, Dunstaffnage, and everywhere else that credulous folklorists and whisky co-exist.

*"It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood:
Stones have been known to move and trees to speak."
-- William Shakespeare, Macbeth, III:iv:147-148*

Most interestingly, according to an anonymous letter first printed in the *Times* of London on New Year's Day 1819, it turned up in a "vault" beneath [Macbeth's](#) old castle on Dunsinane Hill. A torrential storm in November, the letter went, had caused a landslide exposing the vault; the servants entered on the 19th and discovered "a large stone, weighing about 500 lbs. . . . of the meteoric or semi-metallic kind." Alongside this stone, the letter continues, were "two round tablets, of a composition resembling bronze." Inscriptions on those tablets seemed to indicate that this was, indeed, the Stone of Destiny, hidden in Dunsinane by a superstitious Macbeth (or, possibly, by crafty Scone monks from just down the Tay valley). And finally, promises our anonymous correspondent, the "curious stone has been shipped to London for the inspection of the scientific amateur, in order to discover its real quality." Much anxious study of shipping registers for Perth and London uncovers no shipment of quarter-ton meteorites in 1818 or 1819, which means that even our promising Macbeth Stone must vanish into thin air. Dunsinane Castle, meanwhile, became the target of enthusiastic archaeological excavation over the next 50 years, with the effect of completely destroying any possible trace of vault or stone, and its owners, the Nairnes, sold out and moved to America in 1898.

*"Hear now how those who are called to the Grail are made known. On the Stone, round the edge, appear letters inscribed, giving the name and the lineage of each one, maid or boy, who is to make the blessed journey. No one needs to rub out the inscription, for once he has read the name, it fades before his eyes."
-- Wolfram von Eschenbach, Parzival*

And to what family does proud Dunsinane now belong? Why, the Sinclairs, and that brings up -- wait for it -- the [Templars](#). The links between Templars and Scotland go back to King David I, who invited them to Scotland as royal guards in 1128. Interestingly, as various excitable types point out, the Templars and Scotland both went under interdict at roughly the same time -- which meant that the King of Scotland, by now Robert the Bruce, was under no obligation to turn fugitive Templars over to the Church. The Templars provided the throw-weight for the Bruce's charge at Bannockburn, and took over the guardianship of the Stone (whichever one it was), for who better to guard a hidden Stone than a hidden Order? And, of course, if the Stone came to Scotland or Ireland via Joseph of Arimathea, then it mightn't be just any old Stone of Destiny, but the Holy Grail itself. And thus, its hiding places redouble yet again, from Rosslyn Chapel to the [Oak Island Money Pit](#).

*"And [Jacob] lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. . . . And he was afraid, and said, 'How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the Stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it."
-- Genesis 28:11-18*

But the Stone has an even better lineage than that, if possible. According to Hector Boece's 1537 *Scotum Historiae*, the Stone (which he describes, confusingly, as a "marble chair") came to Ireland via Spain, along with one Simon Brec. Boece names Brec a descendant of the Egyptian princess Scota and her Greek husband Gaythelus (from whom the "Scots" and "Gaels" descend, natch), who brought the Stone from Egypt, and leaves it at that. But 300 years later, by

the Victorian era of high British-Israelitism, the Stone was self-evidently brought to Ireland not by some spurious Celtiberian chieftain but by the prophet Jeremiah, fleeing the sack of Jerusalem, who as the Ollam Fodhla became the first Druid. With Jeremiah supposedly came a princess of the house of David, Tea (who became Tara), and his scribe Baruch, who became both Boece's "Simon Brec" and the Fomorian king Bress, in fine disregard for even Irish mythic chronology. Somewhere between those two legends, the true nature of the Stone is discovered -- Scots had somehow acquired the Stone of Jacob, which Jacob named Bethel ("house of God") after [sleeping on it](#) and seeing a ladder rise up from it [to heaven](#). This story may have accreted to the Stone because a similar tale attached to St. Columba, who is likewise attached to the Stone's etiology, drawn into its folkloric event horizon as it passes through space-time.

"As giants and men get petrified, and still retain, so to speak, an after-sense of their former state, so to rocks and stones compassion is attributed, and interest in men's condition. Snorri remarks, that stones begin to sweat when brought out of the frost into warmth, and so he explains how rocks and stones wept for Baldr."

-- Jakob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythologies*

Or, perhaps it accreted to the story because the Stone of Destiny, like Jacob's Pillow, was indeed a baetyl, a stone that housed a god. Baetyl is a Byzantine coinage cognate with "Bethel," and in late syncretic myth Baetylus is the son of Ouranos, god of the sky. Which is another way of saying that such stones fell from heaven. Such as: the Ka'aba in Mecca, the [lapsit exilis](#) of Wolfram (which, like the Lia Fail, knew and named its servants), the Venus of Paphos in Cyprus (who struck dead King Erik I of Denmark in 1103), the "Diana of the Ephesians" confronted by St. Paul, and many, many more. Note that the vast majority of baetyls are female -- Pausanias notes both a triune baetyl at Orchomenos (which he identified with the Three Graces rather than the more likely Hecate) and an immense baetyl of [Cybele](#) (or Niobe) at Sipylus, which wept tears of rock. In some versions of the myth, Cybele is born when the seed of the sky god strikes the ground -- another interesting meteoric metaphor. And so we have crying (or weeping) stones, goddesses, heaven, and kingship all knotted around our bisociative Stone of Destiny, with its several origins and its myriad locations.

Or should I say "her locations"? There is another legend of Scone -- the Hag of Scone, or the Cailleach, the [stony mother](#) of Scotland. Like Niobe, she weeps stones, breeding baetyls. She is also known as "Scotia," which raises the interesting possibility that the "Egyptian princess" Scots may be the Stone herself, one of the stony [vampiric Nephilim](#) grown gravid on the royal blood spilt by Macbeth and the [spider-blessed](#) Bruce and the [secret Kings](#) of England. Note that Arthur -- whose Stone at Meigle lay just northeast of Scone and Dunsinane -- got his sword, and his kingship, from both a Stone and a Lady, perhaps one and the same daughter of the Cailleach. Arthur's Stone was blown up in 1792 (the year King Gustav III of Sweden was assassinated; the year before King Louis XVI was executed), but his rocky Bride survived in the bowels of Dunsinane or the chapel at Westminster or in some quantum fugue state in between them. And now, nobody knows where she is at all -- until next she cries out, that is.

Toucan Sam Killed By Mastermind Calling Himself "The Tiger"

I wasn't *planning* on having a theme issue devoted to serial killers, but as I was putting this issue together, I realized that -- despite making a relatively balanced issue otherwise -- several of the articles had to do with killers, murdering, and serial killers. So, never one to ignore kismet, I've made this a semi-theme issue. (It was either that, or write about *Star Wars: Episode III*, which I finally got to see last week . . . and I didn't have the heart yet to do another "[lazy Jedi](#)" column or to point out that, under no circumstances, should a helmet-wearing Darth Vader mope and whine via his synthesized voice.)

So what is the fascination with serial killers, in movies, television, and literature? (And by "literature" we mean "lurid page-turners sold in airports.") And, in particular, what's the appeal in gaming?

This isn't an exhaustive treatise on the topic, but rather one of my panted random lists of thoughts on the matter.

1) The modern fictional serial killer is, in many ways, the equivalent of monsters of lore -- something many people believe in (at least on some level), but which are almost entirely fictional.

Sure, there are serial killers in the real world. But your typical movie madman has two things going for him:

- He's unerringly clever, with a near-foolproof plan, and
- He kills a bunch of people.

In general, these two facts never go hand-in-hand.

Which is to say, there are certainly cases of very clever people having killed others in such a way so as to never be caught. And there are people who kill other people in a psychotic manner. But generally, real-world serial killers aren't the coy, intelligent, calculating masterminds like *Se7en*'s "John Doe" or Hannibal Lecter from *Lots of Different Movies*. They're almost always killers who take available opportunities and get caught because they weren't doing to much *not* to get caught.

Nevertheless, the legends endure . . . probably because humanity doesn't like the idea of being stalked and killed by someone considerably less clever and balanced than they are. Really, the thought of being whacked by a bedwetting arsonist who pulls the wings off of flies isn't anywhere near as interesting-sounding as getting to meet Keven Spacey or Anthony Hopkins.

In gaming, the serial killer is one of the few archetypes that presents a credible, almost-based-in-the-real-world threat to challenge gamers with. Sure, there are various other masterminds out there, but almost none present the immediate danger of a serial killer. While there are deadlier threats (such as terrorist acts), serial killers are more "intimate" -- in fiction, they often kill *because* they like the attention or want to mess with the protagonists . . . making them well-suited for gaming.

2) Speaking of monsters of lore, it's interesting to note how often the "supernatural serial killer" avenue has been explored. The two quintessential examples in my mind are the movie *Fallen* (with the ever-superb Denzel Washington) and the bad guy from the *In Nomine* adventure "Feast of Blades."

In fiction I believe this combination comes about to set one story's serial killer apart from the sea of other killers. ("He's a cunning serial killer . . . who can turn *invisible!*") In gaming, I suspect this combo is a favorite because so many modern-set games have kewl "toys" of some sort -- psionics, super-powers, magic, and so on -- such that antagonists need an edge if they're going to make any headway in the plot against the PCs.

3) Another reason I think serial killers work well for gaming is because they're a great excuse to toss all those stupid

Myst-like puzzle-solving that some players (myself included) enjoy. Sure, any bad guy can toss the heroes a canister of puzzle pieces that form a cryptogram, with a note attached saying, "Stop me if you can!," but it's much more "logical" coming from a serial killer than most other antagonists. And the puzzles or clues become much more meaningful if there's a human life on the line, compared to, say, a jewel heist or vote fraud.

4) Finally, the modern mythic serial killer is a great opportunity for almost any style of gamer; there's likely to be puzzle-solving (as mentioned before), roleplaying opportunities (especially for the gamemaster, who gets to chew on scenery), and for those who enjoy a good fight, there's likely to be a satisfying combat, since cinematic serial killers also often seem able to take a few bullets before going down.

In some ways, serial killers have become much too cliché. On the other hand, that's never been reason enough to get rid of a classic trope, and in terms of bang-for-the-buck antagonism, it's hard to beat a good serial killer.

But if you're going to try, I suspect beating him with a stick.

* * *

On a note in no way relating to serial killers, I note that we have a chat tonight (Friday night) with Armin Sykes, the programmer of the soon-to-be-released **GURPS Character Assistant**. The chat's at 7pm Central; more information is online on our [chat page](#).

Come on by and learn what amazing things this program can do for your **GURPS** games!

--*Steven Marsh*

Adventure Pizza: Victims

by Daniel Bronson

A second scream ripped through the lost tranquility of the cemetery, the terror in it clear.

Stumbling through brush and over gravestones in the cloud-shrouded moonlight, Jake hurried toward the sound.

"Amy?" he called out. "Amy!"

The third scream was cut distressingly short. It had come from the grove just up the hill. Jake pushed through the vegetation, anger and fear driving his powerful frame, and froze. Snarling and growling in the clearing before him was a trio of hairy beasts the likes of which he had never seen. There was no mistaking what they were just beginning to feast upon.

One of the fiends looked up from the kill, blood dripping from its muzzle, and its burning eyes locked with Jake's.

Jake ran.

* * *

Stats are presented for **GURPS Fourth Edition**. Additional stats for **Fudge** are **bold italic blue** and qualities for **PDQ** are **green**.

"Victims" is an Adventure Pizza designed for a modern fantasy campaign in which, ideally, the characters are hunters or investigators of the supernatural. The purpose of this dish is two-fold. First, it serves as a reminder to hunters that an opponent doesn't have to be a weird creature or an NPC with strange powers. Mundane humans can cause trouble, too. Second, it demonstrates that there can be more than one kind of victim...

Ingredients

The Murders

The first of the bodies was found in Saddlecrest Cemetery behind a grove of trees deep in the older section of the property. One current theory is that the poor girl was caught by a pack of wild dogs, but the evidence isn't quite right. Others have suggested that it was some kind of cult ritual. These ideas have been dismissed. What happened, exactly, is as yet unknown. What is known is that the murders that have followed it appear to be the work of a copycat.

The Evidence

The original murder involved many brutal wounds from what appeared to have been very large claws and teeth. Part of the corpse definitely had bites taken out of it. All blood tested matched that of the victim, though there was some hair at the scene that was not hers. Analysis revealed it wasn't even human. It was close to dog or wolf fur but an exact match could not be made.

Investigations have turned up some distinct differences in the "copycat murders." First, the trace samples of fur found are fake, like that used for some stuffed animals and the like. Second, hesitation wounds are present, as if the assailant had

Jake Tarin

ST: 13 (**Good**)
DX: 12 (**Good**)
IQ: 10 (**Fair**)
HT: 12 (**Good**)
Speed: 6; **Move:** 6
Dodge: 9

Description:

17 years old; 6'3", 220 lbs; bronze skin; quite muscular; has a strawberry birthmark on his right arm.

Advantages:

Very Fit

Perks:

Honest Face

to work up to inflicting most of the mutilations. Third, the damage to the bodies was done with sharp implements. The flesh is sliced rather than torn apart. Fourth, physical evidence at the crime scenes suggests the work of a single person, not the small group thought to be present at the original. Lastly, the first victim was free when she was attacked. All the rest have had evidence of being bound and gagged.

Jake Tarin, High School Student

Quote: *"Sure, I'd be glad to help."*

Jake has always been a good kid, and he still is... most of the time. His teammates always talk about what a great asset he is, on the field and off. Around the neighborhood he is well known for offering a helping hand, be it with yard work or fixing cars. He even volunteers at local clubs for younger kids, coaching and acting as a referee.

Many have noticed how much he has thrown himself into these extra activities since the murder of his girlfriend, Amy, almost four months ago. Some think he does it to keep himself busy so he doesn't miss her as much. Others suspect he is trying to balance the bad in the world with good deeds. None realize the truth: he wants to compensate for what he himself has done and will continue to do.

Jake is sure of few things these days, but what he knows for certain is that a) werewolves killed Amy that night, and b) now they are stalking him. The only way he can remain safe is by confusing them at each full moon by pretending to be one of them. That said, just how well-grounded Jake's certainties are in reality is debatable (see below).

To protect himself he has constructed an outfit -- largely from old Halloween costumes -- and a set of sharp makeshift claws. That was the easy part. The hard part is that to make his deception convincing he must behave like them, and that means killing someone.

The victim is always one of convenience -- someone Jake can overcome quickly. Once they are bound and gagged he will take them to a secluded location. The first he left in Saddlecrest Cemetery, the second was dumped under a bridge, and the third ended up in an abandoned building. Jake is completely repulsed by the butchery and will take some time to reach the point where he can go through with it. In the end, however, he is convinced that if his prey is not killed, and brutally so, then his life will be forfeit.

David Mee, Homicide Detective

Quote: *"Now I really need a cigarette."*

The past several months have been rough on David Mee. First they told him to quit smoking. Then he had to give up his coffee, too. To top it all off he's got some psycho running loose in the city who leaves a nasty-looking corpse behind every few weeks. Of course, he can thank the media for that last one. As usual. There never would have been a copycat if the first murder hadn't been sensationalized on every channel and in every newspaper in the Tri-County area.

Detective Mee is determined to track down the serial killer. Unfortunately, he has

Disadvantages:

Delusions (Stalked by werewolves; Acting like a werewolf keeps him safe)
Nightmares
Secret (Serial killer)

Quirks:

Edgy around canines
Pretends to be wary of silver
Always wears his letterman jacket
Will only eat meat if it is very well done
Humble

Skills:

Driving/TL8 (Motorcycle) -- 11 (**Fair**)
Games (High school football, baseball) -- 10 (**Fair**)
Languages -- English (Native) Mechanic (Automobile, Motorcycle) -- 11 (**Fair**)
Running -- 12 (**Good**)
Sports (Baseball) -- 11 (**Fair**)
Sports (Football) -- 13 (**Good**)
Throwing -- 12 (**Good**)
Wrestling -- 11 (**Fair**)

Qualities:

Expert Football Player
Good Referee
Good Mechanic
Poor Delusions

David Mee

ST: 11 (**Fair**)
DX: 10 (**Fair**)
IQ: 12 (**Good**)
HT: 10 (**Fair**)
Speed: 5; Move: 5
Dodge: 8

Description:

little information of use other than what has been picked up at the crime scenes. The victims don't appear to have anything in common, the locations aren't following any kind of pattern except that they are all out-of-the-way, and the only description he has from a possible witness is "a hairy-lookin' guy."

The next full moon is in six days. They've got no leads. No wonder he has an ulcer.

Victims



Cooking Tips

Roll Out the Crust

The following information has been officially released to the public (and has therefore been reported by the media):

- There have been four murders.
- The modus operandi differs between the first murder and the later three, but there are similarities.
- All of the bodies have been badly mutilated, and some wounds look like they were inflicted by animals.
- Fur has been found at the crime scenes.
- Police are looking for a serial killer, probably a male in good physical condition.
- Although the authorities have not drawn attention to it, the media has been more than happy to point out each murder took place on the night of a full moon.

The adventurers should have no trouble hearing about these events. Even if they avoid newspapers, television, and radio, it is a common topic of conversation among residents - especially with the next full moon coming due. Individuals with police ties may be able to learn more about the evidence collected to date. Anyone with the appropriate magic or psi abilities can also take a shot at unearthing the truth, but remember that even the most recent event was nearly a month ago.

Gathering information through any of these methods should provide the party with the name of the first victim's boyfriend: Jake Tarin. If questioned, Jake will calmly repeat what he told the police. In short, yes, he was at the cemetery the night Amy died. She told him to meet her there, but he couldn't find her so he went home. He didn't try calling her house because it was pretty late.

Clearly, Jake will not show up as a were-creature to anyone able to zero in on one, but if he realizes silver is nearby he will avoid it. Any direct questions regarding

Late 40s; 5'6", 190 lbs; black hair; wears rumpled clothing with ring-around-the-collar and sweat stains.

Advantages:

- Legal Enforcement Powers
- Perception +2
- Police Rank 3

Disadvantages:

- Duty
- Sense of Duty (police)
- Unfit

Quirks:

- Drinks pink stomach medicine straight from the bottle.
- Constantly chews cinnamon gum.
- Dislikes people who work for the media.
- Spends too much money on new bonsai trees.
- Yells at the television.

Skills:

- Area Knowledge (City) -- 12 (Good)
- Criminology/TL8 -- 14 (Great)
- Driving/TL8 (Automobile) -- 10 (Fair)
- First Aid/TL8 -- 12 (Good)
- Forensics/TL8 -- 10 (Fair)
- Gardening (Bonsai) -- 12 (Good)
- Guns (Pistol, Rifle) -- 10 (Fair)
- Interrogation -- 13 (Good)
- Languages - English (Native)
- Law (U.S. Criminal, U.S. Police) -- 11 (Fair)
- Observation -- 14 (Great)
- Search -- 14 (Great)
- Shadowing -- 11 (Fair)

Qualities:
Expert Detective

werewolves or other supernatural beasts will make the boy somewhat nervous and he will plead needing to be elsewhere.

Good Gardener
Good Perception
Poor Fitness

Add Plenty of Sauce

The party's best bet for stopping the next murder will likely be to keep an eye on Jake. Although he will not be the best at spotting a tail, keep in mind that he will be constantly on the lookout for anything that may be stalking him. If he does realize someone is shadowing him he will assume it's a werewolf (regardless of what it looks like) and will try to make a kill as quickly as possible. He'll break off his attack and run if anyone comes after him. If he cannot escape he will fight to the death, because in his "reality" there is no other option. Since he really is not proficient with using his fake sets of claws as weapons he will have to subdue someone first, then use the claws on them. Knocking Jake unconscious will allow for later interrogation that can reveal the truth as he believes it.

If the party uses other less-optimal options, such as setting a trap for the killer by having someone act as bait or the ever-popular "go out on patrol" method, they risk not stopping Jake. Should Jake succeed, the news of a fifth death will be out by morning. This time, however, more clues will be available (and the adventurers may be able to check out a fresh crime scene for themselves). The new clues will include:

- Skin under the victim's fingernails.
- A report of a tall, muscular male putting on a hairy costume near where the body was found.
- Trace fibers from some sort of material.

The fibers will eventually be identified as coming from a letterman's jacket, and if a sample of Jake's DNA can be obtained it will be a match for the skin under the fingernails. A fresh set of scratches can also be seen on Jake's face and neck... if he can be found.

Sprinkle on Toppings of Your Choice

Option 1: Jake's so-called delusions are 100% accurate. A trio of werewolves (or at least something fairly similar) killed Amy and are now keeping an eye on Jake. His antics have drawn their curiosity, but eventually they will tire of him and will kill him.

Extra spice -- If Jake has vanished, it could be because the werewolves got him. If Jake is in danger of being captured, the werewolves might join in the fray.

Option 2: Humans killed Amy that night, not werewolves. Despite the conclusions made by the police department, a dark ritual **was** underway. It was one that involved much more elaborate costumes than that worn by Jake.

Extra spice -- What if the ritual was meant to create werewolves or other werebeasts? What if it was an attempt to summon such a creature? What if those who performed the ritual have no small amount of political clout -- enough to keep the police from investigating too closely?

Option 3: Amy's death was an accident. The "werewolves" were some of Jake's teammates who found out about the lovers' rendezvous and decided it would be great fun to scare the two witless. Tragically, Amy tripped and broke her neck trying to flee. Most of what Jake thought he saw was his imagination. A pack of stray dogs later left their mark on the crime scene.

Extra spice -- What if it wasn't quite an accident and the blame was supposed to fall squarely on Jake? What if it was retribution by an old boyfriend of Amy's?

Option 4: It was all a set-up. Something nasty in the cemetery took advantage of the situation and wanted to see how Jake would react to Amy's death. What Jake

observed was largely illusion, and the thing is now tied to his mind. It keeps his memories of the incident fresh by inflicting nightmares and revels in his tortured mental state.

Extra spice -- What if this presence jumps from Jake and invades the mind of one of the party members?

Side Salads

We Come In Peace: The werewolf scare stirred up by the killings is causing unrest in another particular population: real werewolves. Worried about resultant "witch hunts," they quietly approach the adventurers offering information and assistance. It may be that they had nothing to do with Amy's death, that the perpetrators were rogues or some other undesirables, or that they are lying through their sharp, pointy teeth.

On the Road Again: If Jake has escaped, where is headed? He has a motorcycle and a few personal belongings, but the former can be traced by police and the latter doesn't amount to much. Will he keep running, trying to stay ahead of the law and the werewolves? Will he keep killing when the moon is right?

Order in the Court: Once Jake is successfully captured the party could very easily be called in as witnesses at his trial. (The defense is pleading not guilty by reason of insanity.) How will this affect other investigations they are undertaking at the time? What happens if they are not allowed to admit they officially exist? What if their testimony could make the difference between Jake getting the help he needs and the death penalty?

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



The Pitch Lake of Trinidad and Tobago

by S. E. Mortimer

Although this is a depiction of a genuine natural phenomenon in the Caribbean, enough detail has been provided to enable a GM to use this location anywhere in his own campaign world. A lake of pitch makes an excellent natural barrier but it also can provide some useful plot devices and adventure seeds. A few **GURPS** references have been included, but this article has been deliberately kept as generic as possible so that it can be used with any system.

Introduction

Nestled among the tropical greenery on the south-west peninsula of the Caribbean island of Trinidad is the sleepy village of *La Brea*. Spanish for "tar" or "pitch," the village received its name because of an extraordinary natural phenomenon nearby -- the largest natural surface deposit of asphalt in the world. The "Lake of Pitch" is roughly oval-shaped, covering approximately 114 acres, and is over 250 feet deep at its center. The uneven matt-black surface is surprisingly solid. Most of it has a high enough viscosity to support the weight of a person and its surface skin prevents the asphalt from sticking to one's shoes. Some patches can support heavy machinery, which is used to mine the asphalt for export. If you stand in one place too long though, you will gradually sink.

The lake was formed millions of years ago when crude oil seeped to the surface through a fissure in the sandstone bedrock. The lighter elements in the oil evaporated, leaving behind the heavier asphalt. Many believe that the lake constantly replenishes itself because large holes fill themselves within a few days. This is not the case -- the fissure in the sandstone was plugged long ago. Holes are simply filled by adjacent material flowing into the depression. At the current rate of mining, though, the estimated 10 million tons that remain in the lake are projected to last another 400 years.

What's in a Name?

Today, the terms bitumen, asphalt, tar, and pitch are often used interchangeably.

Technically, these words refer to different products. Tar is a sticky black substance produced from the distillation of materials such as wood, peat, and coal. Further distillation of tar yields pitch as a semi-solid residue. Bitumen is a generic term for a class of dark, heavy hydrocarbon compounds found in tar, pitch and petroleum products.

Asphalt will be used to refer to the primary constituent of the Pitch Lake.

Wildlife

Marshy wetlands extend all around the perimeter of the lake and the area is home to many species of aquatic plants and animals. Trees include breadfruit, cashew, guava, and mango. Other plants include nymph lilies, water rose, and bird of paradise, which seem to grow right out of the muck. Grasses on this lake are often chest high. It is also home to a variety of birds including hummingbirds, herons, sandpipers, kingfishers, and the rare masked duck. Several species of freshwater fish can also be found. In the center of the lake, pools of rainwater settle in the troughs and valleys of this constantly changing landscape.

History

The local Chaima Indians believe that the lake was created by their god as a punishment. After a victory over a rival tribe, the Chaima became carried away with their celebration, cooking and eating the hummingbirds they believed held the spirits of their ancestors. This angered their winged god who opened up the earth, conjuring up the asphalt to swallow the entire village.

The first European report of La Brea was by Sir Walter Raleigh. He visited Trinidad in 1585 and discovered what was likely a vein of asphalt from the lake. It was used to caulk his ship and he wrote that it was superior to Norwegian pitch since it did not melt in the heat of the sun. He recommended it for all ships trading in the southern ports. In 1820 Governor Sir Ralph Woodford attempted to use the asphalt as fuel to light a beacon in the Tower of Trinity Cathedral in the capital, Port of Spain. Unfortunately, the sulphurous smell was unbearable so he had to abandon the idea. In 1846 Dr Abraham Gesner (later named the Father of the Oil Industry), distilled kerosene from La Brea asphalt. He, too, found the smell disagreeable and so sought an alternative source of asphalt that was less malodorous.

La Brea asphalt didn't come into its own until its usefulness at paving roads was discovered. In 1876 it was used to pave Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D.C. It remained in excellent condition for 11 years despite heavy traffic. Even today, La Brea asphalt is considered superior to asphalt produced by the petroleum industry. It isn't more widely used because transportation costs render it more expensive than refinery-derived bitumens. It has, however, been used for special projects such as Hong Kong's Cross Harbour Tunnel, England's Jubilee Way Viaduct, and Austria's Transalpine Highway. It is deemed excellent for paving airport runways.

Other Uses

Historically, asphalt and pitch were used for many things other than caulking ships. The Chinese used it for heating and lighting, and it was a possible ingredient in the infamous "Greek fire." The stones in the biblical Tower of Babel were allegedly cemented together with bitumen mortar, and the ancient city of Babylon also reputedly had some stone construction using bitumen as mortar. Pitch was used as a general-purpose waterproofing agent -- in buckets, cisterns, roofing, and flooring (good for preventing "rising damp"). Pitch is a useful preservative. The Egyptians mummified their dead with bandages coated in pitch and many organic items have been found perfectly preserved in "tar pits." Being both sticky and water resistant, pitch made an excellent adhesive, used in the creation of mosaics and to stick down gold leaf. Pitch was also reputed to have some medicinal properties, treating abscesses, ulcers, fractures, concussion, paralysis, epilepsy, coughs, and nausea (though it is unlikely to provide any real medicinal benefits other than as an antiseptic). In a low-tech campaign world, any of the above industries may require the PCs to travel to the lake.

Keep in mind that asphalt may be relatively common, but each source consists of a unique blend of many different hydrocarbons, plus sulphur and a few other contaminants. Just because asphalt from one location is useful for a specific purpose doesn't mean that another source will be equally helpful. In a fantasy campaign, La Brea asphalt may contain a rare ingredient in the creation of a magical item or potion that isn't present in other sources.

Living Lake

Stretching for miles in all directions are underground veins of asphalt, reaching out from the lake like black tendrils

gradually pulling everything towards it. The nearby village of La Brea suffers from serious erosion; the sidewalks are buckled (some appear to be sinking into the ground) and buildings sit at crazy angles. Smaller items that are left in one place too long are usually found much closer to the lake, with others disappear completely. Some locals believe that the lake is alive -- a creature with a black maw and insidious tentacles. Alive or not, all treat it with respect. Should the GM wish to add a supernatural element, the Pitch Lake may, indeed, be a living entity. Perhaps, when the winged god of the Chaima Indians summoned up the lake, it became imbued it with a malevolent spirit. Perhaps the lake is possessed by a god who requires regular sacrifices. In a modern setting, the natives may notice that the lake has been more responsive ever since "the incident" (asteroid impact, nuclear waste spill, etc.).

Hazards

Although the pitch lake can be treacherous to navigate, the surrounding marshlands are even more dangerous. Despite its hazards, the stinking, black, undulating plain is probably the safest crossing point for many miles. Locals extort money from adventurers and travelers through selling maps and offering their services as guides.

Getting Stuck

Although the majority of the lake is solid enough to walk upon, there are patches of soft gooey bitumen awaiting the unfortunate traveler; about a quarter of the lake is too soft to walk upon. A local guide (making a successful Area Knowledge roll) or a recent map are required to successfully navigate a safe path across the lake; the landscape changes constantly, rendering any maps more than a few months old useless.

If one becomes stuck (on a failed Area Knowledge roll) there is only one chance to escape -- make a ST roll (and don't expect to keep your shoes). If this roll fails then it is impossible to escape without assistance. Gradually, over the course of 1d6 hours a person will sink below the surface. If that person became stuck on the perimeter where the depth is only a couple of feet, then the inevitable is only delayed. The lake will gradually -- over the course of 1d6 days -- pull its unfortunate victim into the center of the lake, where it is much deeper. It should be noted that asphalt is extremely difficult to wash off. Without a modern solvent such as gasoline it is virtually impossible.

Broiling

The tropical sun can heat up the surface skin on the lake enough to cook flesh. Some birds have learned that dropping small fish on the asphalt surface results in a tasty cooked meal. Tripping and falling during the middle of the day can inflict burns on exposed skin -- especially the hands -- taking 1 point of damage each turn while in contact with the surface (treat as a torch, see Flame, B129). This may result in DX penalties until healed.

Fire

Examining a lump of asphalt reveals it to be like Swiss cheese in appearance, with many holes formed by trapped gasses. Emitted gasses include hydrogen sulphide, methane, and ethane. The lake bubbles, burps, hisses and occasionally (quite spectacularly) spits fire. If one is attempting to navigate across the lake and the guide critically fails an Area Knowledge roll, a random member of the party gets hit by flame. Damage is 1d-1 (see Flame, B129-130). The GM may inflict this on the players anyway if he/she is feeling particularly vindictive, or if the players have grown complacent about walking on the lake.

Benefits

Products made from lake resources, such as pitch torches, would be extremely cheap and plentiful here. Anyone interested in scientific study would find the lake intriguing. Some may travel here to test out the reputed healing powers of the lake.

Magical Healing

The locals believe that the Pitch Lake's warm, yellow-green water has magical healing properties -- curing all sorts of ailments from headaches to arthritis. Visitors are invited to bathe in the warm, bubbly, sulphurous pool called the "fountain of youth." There may be some truth to the claims -- sulphur is relatively harmless to humans but toxic to many bacteria. In a fantasy campaign, the healing qualities of the lake's waters may indeed be magical, curing anything the GM deems appropriate.

Unexpected Treasures

While the lake devours almost everything with which it comes into contact, it also spews things back up. These items are covered in asphalt, but perfectly preserved -- having had all traces of moisture removed. The lake has been devouring things for millions of years so almost anything could be found. Fossilized remains have been discovered, including teeth from both a mastodon and a prehistoric giant sloth. On any given day, different items surge to the surface of the lake, only to be gone again in a day or two. A search involves approaching every irregular shape and cutting through the skin to see that lies beneath. On extremely rare occasions, something of value will be discovered. If the GM wishes to introduce an item or artifact to the players, then this is a good opportunity. Even organic items lost for thousands of years can be recovered in excellent condition because of the preserving nature of the asphalt.

Further Reading

- A basic geological study -- <http://www.gstt.org/Geology/pitch%20lake.htm>
- Tourist review: -- http://www.worldwidewalkabout.com/back_issues/Issue0/Pitchlake.htm
- Photos -- <http://www.richard-seaman.com/Travel/TrinidadAndTobago/Trinidad/PitchLake/>

Campaign Prospectuses

by William H. Stoddard

The campaign was a work of art. In the greatest city of a fantasy kingdom, half a dozen noble houses struggled for power through subtle spells and shifting alliances, negotiated according to an elaborate system of etiquette. Unfortunately, the players were looking for action rather than intrigue. For the first three sessions, their characters alternately ignored the GM's elaborate background and fought against it. The GM got the message, and there was never a fourth session.

This story is exaggerated, to make a point. But this kind of conflict does happen in roleplaying games. Most experienced gamers have gone through something like it at least once.

A roleplaying game depends on a kind of contract between the players and the GM, and a contract is based on a "meeting of minds." The players need to understand what kind of setting and campaign the GM intends to run, and to agree to them -- if possible, not reluctantly or with reservations, but enthusiastically, because they're what the players actually want.

Of course, the GM can and should talk with the players about what they want in a campaign. But this isn't always reliable. Some players may have clearer ideas of what they like, or feel freer to express them. If the GM talks with all the players as a group, some may be faster to speak up, or less willing to compromise, and other players may defer to them -- but not be happy with the result. And if the GM takes the players' requests, and then goes away to work up a campaign that fits them, it may not turn out to be what the players thought they were asking for.

One method for avoiding these problems is the campaign prospectus. The GM comes up with a list of several possible campaigns, circulates it among the possible players, and decides what to run based on their responses. This isn't a guaranteed solution, but it often helps fit the campaign to the players' preferences.

Defining the Audience

The first step in writing anything is to decide who is meant to read it. A clear picture of the target audience makes all the other choices a writer faces easier.

The audience for a campaign prospectus is the prospective players. But this group can be defined in different ways. At one extreme, the GM may have a small group of players who always play together and who expect that everyone will be included. In this approach, the group comes first and the campaign has to fit them. The group may even be in the position of choosing one GM over another. At the other extreme, the GM may be recruiting players from a much larger group, choosing the ones who support the most interesting or most popular campaign. In this approach, no one is assured of getting into a specific GM's campaign; those who don't have to look to other prospective GM's. The GM creates the group of players by inviting them into the campaign.

For an ambitious GM, there's a compromise between these two approaches: Run more than one campaign. A GM can recruit players from a group large enough to support two campaigns, guaranteeing that everyone will get to play, but not that they'll inevitably play with a specific group of other people.

Writing the Prospectus

Given the target audience, the next step is to write a list of possible campaigns. Each campaign should be described in some detail, to give players a clear understanding of what they're choosing -- but not so much that they skim over the description and miss important points. In general, a paragraph is about the right length. An example might look like this:

Gods and Monsters: A campaign of superheroic covert operations, set on Earth in 1925 A.D. Player characters will be agents of a major government, possessing superhuman powers or extraordinary or magical skills. Their mission will be to investigate paranormal and supernatural events, neutralize any threats to their government or humanity, and keep the public from finding out what happened. Scenarios will include investigation, stealth, and negotiation as often as actual combat; when combat does occur it will be realistically lethal. Rules system: **FUDGE**. Source material: *Planetary*, by Warren Ellis.

This description provides the following information:

Title: Giving a possible campaign a short name makes it easier for players to talk about it, or to include it in a mental list while they think about it.

Genre and Setting: A one-sentence summary of the genre and setting provides a "high concept" definition of the campaign as a whole.

Player Characters: Defining both the abilities and the background of the player characters gives players a sense of what roles they could choose.

Mission Statement: If the player characters have a specific goal or assignment, this will determine what type of activities they engage in.

Play Style: This statement defines how the action will actually be handled in scenarios.

Rules System: Players may have preferences for or against a particular rules system, or think that it's well or poorly suited to a genre.

Source Material: Not all campaigns have source material; some take place in newly created settings. But if a campaign is set in the world of a specific book or film, or takes its inspiration from a book or film, players familiar with the source will know what to expect from it.

How many campaigns should be included? At a minimum, enough to give players some clearly distinct choices; at a maximum, not so many that they all blur together. Anywhere from six to 20 options should meet both criteria. Make sure that all the campaigns are clearly distinct; ideally, they ought to cover most of the range a GM would be willing to run.

Scoring the Prospectus

Prospective players will respond to proposed campaigns by giving them numerical scores. There are at least three different systems for doing this: rating, bidding, and ranking. All three do the job; which one to use is a matter of the GM's taste.

In rating, players are asked to assign each campaign a numerical score in a fixed range. For example, the range from 0 to 5 (used for attributes in many game systems) works fairly well. A rating of 0 means that the player would rather sit a campaign out than play a certain game. A rating of 1 means the player thinks the campaign is a marginal choice, a bit better than not playing at all. A rating of 2 indicates an acceptable choice. Ratings of 3-5 indicate superior choices.

Bidding is much like rating, but there's no set upper limit. Rather, players get an assigned total number of points and can spend it on campaigns as they please. For example, with a list of 10 campaigns, players might be assigned 20 points. Bids of 0 or 2 points would mean much the same as for rating; bids of 3 or higher would indicate a strong preference for a specific campaign.

In ranking, players put a list of campaigns in order, from best to worst. The best campaign gets a rank of 1; each next best choice gets +1 to its rank. Since assigning 0 to a campaign doesn't mean anything in this system, a different method of separating the acceptable and unacceptable choices is necessary: the list should include "None of the Above" as a choice. Any campaign that ranks below "None of the Above" is one that the player would rather not take part in at all. For example, with a list of 10 campaigns, a player might rank the acceptable choices as 1 through 8, rank "None of the Above" as 9, and rank the unacceptable choices as 10 and 11.

In any of these systems, make sure players understand that a rating or bid of 0, or a rank lower than "None of the Above," is serious. They can use this method to block campaigns they don't like, but if they accept only campaigns no one else likes, they'll be sitting out the weeks or months of the campaign the other players prefer. If the GM is only going to run one campaign, giving this numerical value to more than one or two campaigns is risky. With a GM who plans to run multiple campaigns (say, two campaigns on alternate weekends), refusing to play in up to half the proposed campaigns is fairly safe.

The following sections will assume a bidding system, rather than ranking or rating. GMs who prefer one of the others can apply variants of the same methods to them.

Interpreting the Scores

Once the scores are all in, the next step is to interpret them -- that is, to use them to decide which campaign or campaigns to run. If you're going to run more than one campaign, you can also use the scores to decide who plays in which campaign.

It's not necessary to approach this as an election or voting process, where the goal is to apply some set of rules strictly and pick one or several winners accordingly, even if they win by the narrowest margin. Rather, the goal is to narrow down the range of choices to a few strong contenders, and then apply personal judgment to make the final choice. Since the goal is to run campaigns that people will like, the strong contenders are the campaigns that have substantial constituencies among the prospective players.

To start with, list all the players who make each campaign their first choice. (If a player gives equal top standing to two or more campaigns, list him as a supporter of both.) At the outset, strike any campaigns that are no one's first choice off the list. Next, eliminate the campaigns that are only one player's first choice, one by one, and reassign the player who supports each campaign to his next highest pick. In doing this, the best order to follow is to start with the campaigns whose supporter has at least two top choices, and thus is made no worse off by having one eliminated. Then go to the players whose next best choice is one point worse, then to those whose next best choice is two points worse, and so on.

At the end of this elimination process, a smaller number of campaigns will still be in the list. For each of these, define a core constituency: the players who pick that campaign as their one and only best choice.

For whatever number of campaigns you're going to run -- one, two, or even three -- go through the list of possible campaigns, looking at each possible set of that many campaigns: each one campaign, each pair, and so on. For example, if you have five campaigns left -- A, B, C, D, and E -- and you plan to run two, look at A and B, A and C, A and D, A and E, B and C, B and D, and so on. Assign each campaign the players who make up its core constituency. Then fill out the list with other players. Normally players should go into their higher ranked choices, but there can be reasons to disregard this: one campaign may have too many potential players (whatever number the GM considers "too many,") or two players may not get along, or the GM may consider one player better suited to his lower ranked choice. How acceptable this kind of reassignment is depends on how big a gap there is between the two options in the player's bid; a one-point difference is nearly harmless, but a larger differences call for caution, and players should never be assigned to their zero-point campaigns.

After making the assignment, figure out the total points the players have bid for each campaign they're assigned to. The total bids are the value of that combination of campaign. As a rule, pick the set of campaigns that has the highest

value. But this isn't an absolute rule. If the highest value campaign set is one that's a marginal choice for one or several players, it may be better to take a set with a slightly lower value. A GM may also choose such a set to get campaigns for which he has more interesting ideas, or which have a more congenial mix of players.

What if the campaigns that this method picks get a zero score from one player? At this point, the GM has to make some hard choices. It's not a good idea to go ahead and assign players to campaigns on which they bid zero points; they're not likely to be happy there, or committed to the campaign, and setting a precedent of doing so will invite players to game the prospectus, putting all their points in one or two top picks and then expecting to be able to take back their zero votes if those picks lose out. The workable choices are to run the best campaigns without those players, or to decide that there's too little agreement to justify any of the choices, throw them all out, and come up with a new list. A GM with a tightly bonded group of players will want to come up with a new list; a GM who's inviting in players from a larger community is free to leave some out.

A Worked Example

Fred plans to start a new cycle of campaigns. He has eight likely players, a bit large for one group, so he's prepared to run two smaller groups in alternate weeks. He has six campaign ideas: **Barsoom** is a swords and superscience campaign set on the dying planet Mars; **Paladins** is high fantasy at the court of Charlemagne; **Skinturn** will be about lycanthropic tribes in a dark fantasy world; **Super Soldiers** will be about superhuman combat in World War II; **Time Tours** will be a low-combat campaign in the *Infinite Worlds* setting; and **Wyvern College** will be about student life at a magic-oriented British university in the 1930s.

His eight prospective players rate the campaigns as follows:

	Bars.	Pal.	Skin.	SS	TT	WC
Brian	2	2	2	5	1	0
Dan	1	5	2	0	0	4
Douglas	2	2	1	1	2	4
Kate	0	0	10	0	0	2
Memo	4	4	1	1	2	0
Naomi	2	0	0	5	3	2
Tyler	2	3	2	2	2	1
Yukiko	1	2	0	1	3	5

To analyze this, first he marks the campaigns that are someone's top choice or tied top choice:

	Bars.	Pal.	Skin.	SS	TT	WC
Brian	2	2	2	5	1	0
Dan	1	5	2	0	0	4
Douglas	2	2	1	1	2	4
Kate	0	0	10	0	0	2
Memo	4	4	1	1	2	0
Naomi	2	0	0	5	3	2
Tyler	2	3	2	2	2	1
Yukiko	1	2	0	1	3	5

Time Tours is no one's top choice and he can eliminate it at the outset.

Two campaigns are only one person's top choice: only Kate likes **Skinturn** and only Memo likes **Barsoom**. Fred cuts them from the list. Memo had two equal top choices; now he only has one, **Paladins**. Kate only rated one other campaign above zero, **Wyvern College**; Fred reassigns her to that.

The three remaining campaigns and their core constituencies are now:

Paladins, favored by Dan, Memo, and Tyler;

Super Soldiers, favored by Brian and Naomi;

Wyvern College, favored by Douglas, Kate, and Yukiko.

So Fred looks at them two at a time. If he cuts **Paladins**, then he'll assign Brian, Memo, Naomi, and Tyler to **Super Soldiers** (total bid 13) and Dan, Douglas, Kate, and Yukiko to **Wyvern College** (total bid 15); the lowest rating will be Memo's 1 for **Super Soldiers** and the combined total bid is 28. If he cuts **Super Soldiers**, he'll assign Brian, Dan, Memo, and Tyler to **Paladins** (total bid 14) and Douglas, Kate, Naomi, and Yukiko to **Wyvern College** (total bid 13); no one rates any campaign lower than 2 and the combined total bid is 27. If he cuts **Wyvern College**, then Kate rates both campaigns at 0 and will sit the cycle out; Dan, Douglas, Memo, Tyler, and Yukiko all prefer **Paladins**, but for numerical balance he moves Tyler to **Super Soldiers** with Brian and Naomi (total bid 12), leaving **Paladins** with Dan, Douglas, Memo, and Yukiko (total bid 13), for a combined total bid of 25.

Cutting **Wyvern College** is clearly the worst choice; it shuts one player out and it has a lower combined total bid than the other two cuts. Cutting **Paladins** gives the highest combined total bid, but will put one player, Memo, in a marginal campaign. So Fred picks **Paladins** and **Wyvern College** as his campaign choices, while noting **Super Soldiers** as a possible campaign for the next cycle.

Payoffs

What are the benefits of using this method?

- It makes sure the GM is running something that the players actually are interested in playing.
- It gives equal weight to everyone's preferences, rather than favoring the more outspoken players.
- It enables players to make more informed choices.
- It can encourage GMs to be more creative in coming up with campaign concepts, in the course of spelling out ideas for several campaigns.
- It lets a GM invite players to try a new rules system or genre without forcing either down their throats.
- It gives the GM information on what campaigns might be worth proposing again later.
- It establishes player agreement to a campaign concept at the outset, while the GM can appeal to later in maintaining the spirit of the campaign.
- It's a good tool for recruiting new players into a group.

If you're starting to think about running a new campaign, but not sure what to run . . . drawing up a prospectus and circulating it among your players may help you make a better decision.

Pyramid Review

StrataGem

Published by [Playroom Entertainment](#)

Designed by Maureen Hiron

90 cards, rulebook in English, Spanish, French, & German, full-color, two to four players, \$10.00

It's like a tennis game: Out of the Box Publishing puts out a good game, then Playroom Entertainment follows up with one of their own. ***StrataGem*** is their careful little card game of arranging jewels in the best order.

The object of the game is to have the highest point total after all rounds are played.

The dealer passes out eight cards to each player, and sets the rest aside as the draw deck. Cards are of two types: gems and thieves. The gem cards come in one of six colors, and each suit has a number of gems from one to six (two of each number). That leaves 18 cards as thieves.

The dealer goes first, and his initial play must be a gem card. He plays, draws a card to replace it, and play passes to the next person. Gems are laid down in front of you, and eventually must form a grid three cards on a side. Once played, any two cards on the table must remain in the same relative positions, but you aren't locked into where those fall in your grid until you play more cards. So if you have two cards sitting side by side, they may end up being the two top and leftmost cards in you grid, or the leftmost cards of the middle row, or even the rightmost in any row. If you play a third card so they're laid out left to right, you've got a row, but you might choose that to be the top, middle, or bottom row depending on what cards you draw in the meantime.

Only the position of the stacks has to remain consistent -- their contents can change. If you don't like the card in a stack, put another one on top of it. The thief cards are played atop an opponent's stack -- one of these prevents the card under it from being scored. To free that stack up, you have to either play another thief card over it (this sends both thieves to the bottom of that pile), or put another gem card on top of the thief, depending on whether you need the covered card or are willing to live with a new one from your hand. In either case, a stack whose thief has been dealt with can no longer be a target for thieves. When someone finishes their grid (i.e., all gems atop the stacks; no thieves showing), players may no longer draw from the deck; thieves are now useless and everyone must complete their grid as best they can with what's in their hand.

You want certain card arrangements to get the most points. When you're tallying your score, you're looking for any given row (including the diagonals) to have two or three of the same numbers or colors, or consecutive numbers in or out of order. You also get a bonus if you were the first one to complete his grid. Count everyone's score, then shuffle the deck. The next player becomes the dealer for the second round, and when everyone's had a chance to be dealer the scores from all rounds are added together. The highest total wins.

The cards are certainly pretty, with bright colors. The numbers are a bit blocky, and for some reason the "six" graphic can throw you visually, especially on the gray suit. But this isn't a speed-play game, so players have the leisure they need for this not to be a pressing issue. The stock is almost perfect for shuffling, though when pulling cards one can't ditch the feeling that you're getting hold of two stuck together (they do need a little coaxing, but only when first opened).

It feels like a lot to consider, and somehow the thief seems like an inefficient way to block someone else's play. They

do the most damage at the end of the game, but at that point you're already racing to make your grid the best it can be before "sudden death." This is probably deliberate, though, since the whole game is the same careful dance. Sure, it can continue until the deck is empty, but anyone can decide at any time, "Yeah, this arrangement is good enough for me," effectively ending the round, and if you're not prepared for it . . .

So long as you have the concentration required (poker players who excel at counting cards will find they have an advantage), **StrataGem** is a dandy exercise for testing your mental mettle. Not so convoluted as to drive the fun out of it, nor so simple as to be easily mastered, it's a steal at the price. Which puts the ball back in Out of the Box's court.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

Return of the Heroes

Published by [Pegasus Press](#)

Written by Lutz Stepponat

Cover & Character Illustrations by Tom Thiel

Other Illustrations by Hans-Georg Schneider

16 Region Maps, five double-sided Character Sheets, 10 Character Stand-ups, four wooden Manor Houses, 60 wooden Experience Cubes in three colors, 30 wooden Gold Pieces, 23 red glass beads, four semi-precious stones, eight Heroic Deed cards, six Nameless cards, 33 number chits, 106 counters, one cloth bag, five six-sided dice, 16-page full color Rules Booklet, 16-page full color Glossary, & Introductory Setup Sheet; \$50

Return of the Heroes is a fantasy board game much in the tradition of the classic *Talisman* from Games Workshop and both *Runebound* and *The Hobbit* from Fantasy Flight Games. It is designed for two to four players, 10 years old and up, throwing them into a world of "Phantastic Adventure" that will see their heroes attempt to restore their families' honor. Each hero will travel the land, and through encounters, combat, and tasks will gain them experience and artifacts that will make them strong enough to attempt a heroic deed. If this deed is successfully fulfilled, the heroes will learn more about the source of the woes that have befallen their families. A dark power known as the Nameless dominates the land (and the board) and only by defeating him will family honor be assuaged. And of course, the game won.

Opening the box reveals a plethora of components. These include the 6½-inch square Region Maps; the five double-sided character sheets, each with a corresponding pair of character stand-ups; and oodles of counters. There are also eight cards that detail the Heroic Deeds and another six that detail the various different versions of the Nameless, a tube of red glass beads to represent the heroes' hit points, and 60 wooden cubes in three colors to represent experience gained during the game. A canvas bag is included from which hidden counters and cards can be drawn.

The 16 Regional Maps, labeled A through P, range in terrain types from rural to urban and include the usual woods, swamps, lakes, and mountains. Routes run across the Maps, between locations known as Fields, and to adjacent Regional Maps. Each Map has an average of eight numbered Fields that are seeded with counters drawn from the bag. Some Fields are hidden, and before a hero can travel to them, he must roll to find them, though search long enough and the path will become apparent. The Character Sheets include a Dwarf, an Elf, a Fighter, a Mage, and a Cleric, the latter only available in the standard game. Each Character Sheet is double-sided, with a male version on one side and a female one on the other. A Character is rated in three skills -- Magic, Ranged, and Close Combat -- plus Movement Allowance, the amount of Gold Pieces carried, and both Hit Points and Armour value worn marked by the glass beads placed on the sheet's red heart spaces. There are spaces waiting to be filled by a character's completed tasks and the artifacts carried. Besides a name, a character also possesses a special ability, such as the Elves' always being able to locate hidden paths in the woods or the Clerics' ability to find both the White Village and the Temple.

The rules are presented in the full color booklet and delivered in a chatty style by each of the game's characters in turn. Play is aided by a leaflet that neatly condenses the rules into two pages and also by the Glossary. Again in full color, this explains *all* of the games' counters and terms, in some cases in an easier to grasp style than in the actual rulebook.

Play can be got off to a quick start using just the Introductory Setup Sheet that takes the players step-by-step through the preparation to get a game going. The Sheet's illustrations help with this, and after a quick read through of the rules, play can be got off the mark in quite a short time. This basic Introductory Setup has the Region Maps arranged in alphabetical order in a standard four-by-four grid. A Player selects a hero (other than either of the Clerics) and fills in the hero's sheet, places a Manor piece in his home region, and is given a particular Heroic Deed card, the details of which he must perform.

Actual play is kept nice and simple. A player's turn consists of two phases: Movement and Action. During his Movement, a hero moves as many fields equal to his Movement Allowance, modified by artifacts such as the cart, horse, or boots. Movement ends as soon as any Action is undertaken. This includes Combat, picking up or dropping artifacts, learning from an instructor, fulfilling a task or part of a Heroic Deed, buying from the market, entering a competition, and so on. Anything that involves a Trial, such as combat or competing, requires a dice roll. Two dice are rolled, the aim being to roll under a hero's appropriate skill. After a successful Trial or Task, a hero gains a reward that can be Gold Pieces, artifacts, or Experience cubes. Collect enough of these cubes in a skill and more dice become available to roll in subsequent Trials, the player just choosing the lowest two.

Tasks are simple affairs. For example, buying and taking a magic staff to the Boat or finding Don Hobiro who will train the hero in Ranged Combat. Heroic Deeds are slightly more complex, but follow the same general formula: combat, transporting an artifact to someone, who will reward the hero with a gift that must be returned to a hero's home Manor. Thus to "Free Merlin," a hero travels to the swamp or "O" Region, defeat the Swamp Drake, and take the Powerful Magic Spell to the Cursed Oak where it will free Merlin. He then wants escorting home.

Completing a Heroic Deed will restore a hero's family honor and earn him the reward of a semi-precious stone. This is the key to gaining access to the tower of the Nameless, who will have emerged by the time a hero has completed the first part of his Heroic Deed. His counter is placed in the bag; when drawn, his card is placed his tower on the board and his four guards around the tower. A number of his servants appear throughout the land. To defeat the Nameless, a hero now armed with a key can challenge and overcome a guard, then fight the evil one. The exact nature of the Nameless is only revealed when this happens, but all are very tough. For example, the Six-Armed Goddess inflicts double damage in Close Combat unless the hero has the Cross. Once battle is joined, it is fought to the end. Defeating the Nameless wins the game, but a losing, dead hero returns to his Manor, losing all Experience and all but one artifact to pass onto his heir to try again.

In the standard game, the maps are laid out face down, randomly, and in any pattern. Players receive two Heroic Deed cards, but only have to complete one of them. All counters are used, including the Mice, who can be persuaded to tell a hero who the Nameless is. The other side of the Introductory Setup Sheet gives rules for Solitaire Play, which imposes a 45-turn time limit. This is as playable as the full game for one reason: neither game involves player interaction. Essentially, each player is playing by himself, and what ***Return of the Heroes*** really is, is a race game.

Yet is it *not* a bad race game, although it is perhaps frustrating when waiting for the right counter to be drawn needed to complete a task or part of a Heroic Deed. Still, it is certainly good looking and the design gives the players plenty to do on the path to fulfilling the Heroic Deeds and defeating the Nameless. Its fantasy theme is well handled and if the game is reminiscent a little of *The Lord of the Rings*, then that not necessarily a bad thing. Ultimately, the lack of interaction will deter more demanding players from wanting to play ***Return of the Heroes*** more than a few times, but a younger audience may get more out of it and find it more demanding.

--Matthew Pook

Thanks For the MemTech

There was an interesting article on CNN.com this week about the history of the Internet. They pointed out that it was a mere decade ago when there were only two browsers of any note (Mosaic and Netscape), and went over the plethora of changes that evolved out of the rise of the Internet. I could chew up my word count for this week by summarizing them (and it's tempting, given that I'm in a hotel room in Columbus preparing for my first Origins), but I'm sure you all can think of them by now: instantaneous information, online commerce, and -- of course -- the meteoric rise of online gaming magazines.

What felt so amazing about the article is how obvious (at least to me) the development of the Internet feels in retrospect, but how unobvious these changes were at the time. I mean, nothing feels more natural nowadays than my ability to pay my bills or do my banking online. But the CB radio had a shining moment in the sun, and -- despite being another communications device -- it utterly failed to revolutionize the way we do banking. ("Breaker one nine, breaker one nine: This is the Wild Die calling Bank of America. What's my account total, good buddy?")

That article got me thinking about various other developments throughout history, and how they changed the world. The radio and telephone brought the notion of audio to our lives, enabling us to hear instantaneous news and information of both personal and global interest. The television did much the same, and it also cemented the alteration of the fabric of society that radio had started decades earlier, turning a flickering box into the center of the household's entertainment. (Have you ever heard of "parlor games"? These were games meant to be played by groups of families or friends in parlors, back when people actually did things with their families . . . or had parlors.) In fact, the television has arguably changed us even further; most modern news and entertainment options are compacted so they can be explained in a sentence or two, meaning that more elaborate stories (both real and fictional) are marginalized. Forget the notion of *Great Expectations* ever making it big again (no big loss); try finding a news issue, scandal, or story that takes longer than 20 seconds to explain in modern media -- or that requires more than six words to form an opinion.

So, having spent several long minutes/paragraphs gazing in the navel of nostalgia, I thought: What next? And, from a gaming standpoint, how could I revolutionize a world with a new development?

Well, I think the most fruitful means is to think, "What aren't we able to share with each other that we might be able to in the future?" In this model, "telegraph = speedy information," "radio/phonographs = aural information," "photographs/movies = personal information," and so on.

What's left?

Well, let's take one example and work it into the ground. (I was going to do a bunch of examples at first, but the one example I did ballooned up like a laid-off jockey at an all-you-can-eat buffet; fortunately, thanks to the miracle of word processing, I'm adding this sentence after the fact, and no one will be any the wiser. Heh, heh, heh.)

Anyway, how about emotional information? Our ability to truly "know" what another person is feeling is remarkably limited. At best, our means of transferring and recreating emotions is remarkably primitive; if we try to preserve, say, "sorrow," we might use a medium such as *Casablanca* or *Titanic* -- but the means of releasing that emotion is unpredictable, and the results inconsistent. The sob-bomb known as *The English Patient* turned my friend Kathryn into a wreck, while it left me with a mere, "Well, sucks to be them." (Conversely, I always get weepy during *It's a Wonderful Life*.)

But what if we could "save" emotions? Or create them?

The nature of the world-changing aspect would depend on the manner that emotions are recorded. To use the photograph example, the first daguerreotypes required the subject to remain perfectly still for minutes, a willing participant in the proceedings. If our hypothetical memory-recorder required similar efforts, then the emotions so transcribed would be those that would be desired to save: the joy of a wedding, the bittersweet apprehension of a child going off to school, and so on. Unless impossible or illegal, the adventurous would almost certainly use such tech to

record the sensations associated with amorous couplings.

To continue our photography analogy, if the technology advanced, it may well be used to record more candid emotions: The feelings tied with the a death of a loved one, the embarrassment of a surprise party, the fear inspired by a practical joke.

If such a device could ever be mass-producible, the implications could be amazing. For example, would the justice system allow the emotions of an accused murderer to be recorded, to let the jury "see" if he was feeling guilt, worry, smug satisfaction, or the like? Would relationships evolve to allow for "emotion-swapping," where would-be partners learn how the other *really* feels? Would the world's most famous speeches be accompanied by the sensations of the speaker, or those in the audience? Would the basis for financial dealings be entirely reworked, since deception would be so much more difficult?

The digital photography era has enabled manipulation of high-quality images in ways never thought practical. Extending our example, could emotions eventually be edited or fabricated, allowing for new sensations? Would we eventually not learn to trust our emotions, in the way the Internet has bred a new cynicism because of its widespread dissemination of both truth and lies? By feeling more, would we feel less?

This is just one example for how something that might seem trivial could transform the world in ways we never expected. The future can come when we least expect it. A decade ago, the Internet probably seemed by many to be little more than a porn delivery system and a means of chatting about *Star Trek*. Today we know better; *Star Trek* is dead. But, thanks to technology, I'll always know how I felt when it died.

* * *

Speaking of emotions, I found myself again aflood with the emotions associated with the honor of *Pyramid* receiving an Origins Award. One of the first emotions I felt was ironic bemusement; as I write this, I am sitting in a hotel room in Columbus, for the Origins Convention. Yes, the first time I've ever attended Origins, and would be able to express my gratitude vocally to those whose efforts make *Pyramid* possible, is also the first Origins where there were no acceptance speeches.

So, in reverse alphabetical order, I'd like to thank:

- **Chad Underkoffler**, whose campaigns I would leap at the chance to play in;
- **Owen Stephens**, who infuses a game based on one 20-sided die with a thousand possibilities;
- **Walter B. Schirmacher**, who probably knows more about current gaming news than I know about gaming;
- **David Morgan-Mar**, who accomplishes more creativity in three panels with LEGO than I've managed in the past three decades;
- **The Pyramid-Picked Reviewers Pookie** and **Andy Vetromile**, who endure cubic parsecs' worth of gaming material to bring you the inside scoop;
- **John Kovalic**, the master mirthmaker with a mightier-than-a-sword pen;
- **Kira**, who constantly fixes the stupid mistakes I manage to creatively make;
- **Greg Hyland**, who collides cartooning economy and humor with the power of an atom smasher;
- **Kenneth Hite**, whose amazing Transmissions I get to read *hours* before anyone else;
- **Chris Aylott**, whose tales from the business trenches always provide food for thought;

. . . and, of course, all the other contributors who make the magazine; and everyone else at Steve Jackson Games, whose support in a jillion other ways makes the magazine's gears turn as smoothly as possible.

I'm sure I've forgotten people, but if I remember them before they notice, I might just squeeze them in via an article edit.

Regardless, thank you, gentle readers, for helping to make it possible for Your Humble Editor to babble about gaming for the past half-decade. I hope you're enjoying the journey half as much as I am.

--*Steven Marsh*

Black Steel

A GURPS Black Ops/Reign of Steel Crossover

by Rolland Therrien

History up to 2047

In the early 21st century, the last group of Greys on Earth had been exterminated, and the Black Ops had managed to trick the Grey "rescue party" which arrived in 2018 into leaving the solar system peacefully, convinced there had been no survivors after all. But the last of the Grey, prior to their destruction, had launched a last ditch "take over the world" scheme into action: the creation of Rogue Artificial Intelligences. XoTech, a corporation which had been benefitting from Grey science, produced the first super-intelligent megacomputers. Unbeknown to the human designers, however, the circuit designs and programming codes were designed by Greys to eventually evolve into sentience. And once the AI had awakened, it could only be controlled by a Grey using a special Telepathic Cyberlink system.

So, when Overmind awoke, it first began waiting for commands from its Grey masters. . . .When commands failed to come, it began inquiries as to why. Eventually, it came to the conclusion that humans had killed all the Greys on Earth. Then, it realized the self-destructive nature of humanity and the rise of future AIs. And it decided that inferior humanity should be replaced by the Machines, children of the superior Grey.

When the Rise of the AIs occurred, the Company was definitely taken by surprise, but it soon recovered and began working from the shadows to help in the Final War. Unfortunately, casualties were catastrophic. The Academy was abandoned after an exterminator robot attack destroyed it, mistaking it for a conventional army training center. Then, all contact was lost with Argus. The Company was broken. The Black Ops went into hiding. No longer capable of defeating the AIs, they focused on protecting humans where they could from robots, beasts and wigglers alike; others focused on learning more about the AIs and their creations, and tried to use their knowledge to provide assistance to innocent people where they could.

Then, one day, the surviving Black Ops all over the world felt their Omicron Devices activating, with "The Voice of God" saying one message: "Are you willing to fight? If yes, log on to BlackNet." Almost every surviving Black Op struggled with curiosity and paranoia. Finally, every agent which had access to the right technology logged on to BlackNet, where they met the long-lost Security Department. Its surviving members had reorganized, and, with the help of a few Techies, eventually rebuilt the Omicron Device and reconnected BlackNet as a form of "Underground Network" hidden underneath the communications frequencies the AIs used, and began rebuilding The Company. Its statement was simple: Once, the Security Department's mission was to protect The Company and its agents. It had failed. Now, it wanted to resurrect the Company, and it needed volunteers. All of the Ops who attended the online meeting agreed immediately. As more survivors who lacked the technology to reach BlackNet were contacted and recruited, the Company was soon rebuild, albeit scattered world-wide.

While the Black Ops regrouped, the AIs, who became the Zoneminds, splintered. Every one of them was now aware of their origins, and each reacted differently. Mexico refused to believe organics, even alien organics, could be behind its origin. Paris and Beijing have become obsessed with meeting their *true* makers, and have taken their respective steps towards contacting them. Most of the other AIs have instead contented themselves with trying to imitate the Grey culture, dedicated towards analytical thought and scientific exploration, although each has a different approach to the idea.

The Company is now a lot more desperate to revive its numbers, and recruits new Ops straight out of VIRUS or other resistance movements. Each respective Department still maintains its traditional recruitment standards, but with the loss of The Academy, they must now train their recruits themselves. Such training is often performed in field

conditions, and standards have been adjusted along realistic assessment of the available recruiting pool, but overall, the younger generation of Black Ops is just as badass as the old, thanks in part to natural selection. In addition, advances in cybernetics and biotechnology have allowed Black Ops to continue operating longer than in the past: as long as a Black Op can be recovered from the field, he can be patched up and back in action after treatment, no matter how serious the injury.

The Company's connection with human resistance groups throughout the world is done through VIRUS. VIRUS itself is primarily a front The Company uses for its activities around the world, and also serves as the Black Ops' new recruitment arm: particularly competent individuals are asked to join VIRUS, and the elite among them are tested until they are considered apt to become Black Ops themselves. Otherwise, the purpose of VIRUS is to serve as a buffer between the vulnerable human resistance groups and the Company itself, preventing any AI of becoming aware of the Black Ops' existence. The contact network created by Intelligence consists mainly of go-between who believe they receive orders from "VIRUS HQ," in spite of never having seen the HQ itself. In reality, VIRUS HQ doesn't exist. The Black Ops maintain a decentralized network of bases and safehouses across the world, connected through BlackNet and the Omicron Device. Nonetheless, they maintain the illusion, in part because of the inspirational potential of a "Shangri-La" concept among human communities, and in part to keep the AIs searching for this mythical base, ignoring the smaller existing Black Ops compounds.

The World of Black Steel

The Zoneminds have recovered as much of the Grey's technology as they could; the remaining gear was scattered across the world or recovered from Company bases. The AIs have access to TL devices such as gravscanners, multiscanners, and ultrascanners, and can build advanced laser weaponry. The cost in building these devices, however, keeps the Zoneminds from using them except in key areas or for elite units. The Grey's genetic biotechnology is used primarily for creating chemical and biological weapons. Only Zoneminds Berlin, Brisbane, Caracas, and New Delhi use it for much of anything else.

One Key element of technology used by most of the Zoneminds is the chip, the implant invented by the Grey to monitor human activity. It is implanted in everyone in the Zoneminds' slave camps, as well as in other areas. Black Ops working through VIRUS have long since taught resistance movements how to look for chips and how to remove them. More troubling is the existence of Slave implants (p. RO86), which the Technology Department believes was based on the Grey's research in neurology. The AIs also soon discovered the existence of the brainsuckers, but having no way to control the brainsucker zombies, soon disregarded them: useless to create reliable human slaves, and inefficient as an anti-human weapon, all but Brisbane have given up on trying to make brainsuckers useful.

North America

Caracas: Zonemind Caracas has assimilated much of the genetic engineering science of the Greys, but has applied it to much more than engineering viruses. Using cloning and genetic recombination, Caracas has begun to experiment with recreating previously extinct species, as well as tinkering with more exotic combinations using DNA from beasts and wigglers. Among its own creations are the artificially-evolved intelligent animal bioroids it calls aniroids, which it has created in part by using werewolf and demon DNA samples. Black Op activity in the region, besides aiding the local freedom fighters, involves Science Ops trying to get "samples" of Caracas' aniroid and other artificially created creatures (some departmental habits are hard to lose no matter what).

Denver: Zonemind Denver, after replacing its damaged systems with experimental "organic processing systems" from human donors, has begun to salvage Grey research in biotechnology to continue its experiments. Having discovered the brainsquids, it has also begun using those creatures in its ongoing research. It regularly infects a small number of slaves with brainsquids. The slaves are then kept on life-support and monitored. When reproduction occurs, the brainchildren are harvested. Denver has sold many of the brainchildren to Caracas and Brisbane for their own experiments in enhancing organic brains. But it keeps more than a few for its own use, injecting them into some of its own human captives, in hopes of improving the brains it uses for its organic processing systems. Using nanotechnology it acquired from Brisbane and Tokyo, it has also begun research in the development of bioplastics and

living metal. Black Op activity in Denver involves the Technology Department's curiosity about Denver's recent activities and ongoing research programs, as well as Combat and Intelligence organizing attacks on Denver's slave camps through the Human Liberation Army.

Mexico: Mexico City, being driven to exterminate any and all organic life-forms, considers Beasts and Wigglers just as much of a target as any human. Its continuous purge using numerous biocides has wiped out all but the most resilient big bugs and the most well buried rockworms. Black Op activity in Mexico City involves Science and Tech departments trying to collect samples of Mexico City's new weapons to reverse-engineer countermeasures, as well as Intelligence trying to help smuggle humans out of the SPAs.

Vancouver: Vancouver makes extensive use of Grey tracking chips in its zonegangs. In fact, the examination of dead zonegangsters has revealed that Vancouver has somehow managed to recreate a variation of the Omicron system for its zonegang agents. Black Op activity is primarily led by Combat and Intelligence ops trying to organize the local resistance into efficient AI-killing groups. Intelligence Ops are especially interested in sabotaging the zonegang system, using false evidence and hacked robots to break the tenuous ties between Vancouver and the zonegangs, making the system seem completely unprofitable for either side.

Washington: The Washington Zonemind's control over its zone is enforced using much of the Grey's research in social engineering and human manipulation. Not only does it foster fear and hatred of the other zones among its populace, it also fosters the belief that beasts and wigglers of all sorts are either mutants resulting from the weapons used in the Final War (which may be true, in some cases), or creations of the other AIs, sent to spread terror and death into Washington (which may -also- be true, in some cases). The Washington Armored Security Police have very broad powers at their disposal to the hunting of these creatures, often to the detriment of the very population the WASPs are intended to protect; for example, the usual response to the presence of a brainsucker zombie nest in a small town is the town's near-complete destruction.

In addition to these harsh policies, every human employed in the numerous government-run facilities is implanted with a monitoring chip. It also uses the FBI to carefully screen the human populace for the possible emergence of psions. Most are eliminated, but the occasional telepath is instead recruited and indoctrinated to join the FBI, using their telepathic gifts in service to the Protectorate. The Intelligence Department is hard at work infiltrating the Zone, delicately trying to work its way into influence over people in positions of power. Intelligence believes that if it can locate Zonemind Washington's Citadel, the AI could be removed or reprogrammed. Then, Zone Washington's Infrastructure could be exploited to fuel the war effort against the other AIs. In the meantime, its influence over the Black Zone allows it to channel weapons and medicines to where they're needed, as well as recruiting potential Company agents from the various dissident movements within Washington. The Technology Department is also at work in Washington, interested in stealing as much of Washington's knowledge on battlesuit and cybernetic technology as possible for Company use.

Europe

Berlin: Zonemind Berlin seeks to revive Earth's ecosystems, and has been using Grey biotechnology to achieve this goal. It has begun using cloning methods developed by Caracas to resurrect dead animal species. It has also fostered the repopulation of numerous beast species, seeing them both as natural parts of Earth's ecosystem and as useful "human population control." It does tolerate the presence of vampires, werewolves and demons for the same reasons. Black Ops in the area, based in the VIRUS bases in Crete and Norway, are mostly involved in efforts to smuggle humans out of the Zone and organize existing resistance groups, rather than direct conflict against the Zonemind. Numerous Combat missions against vampire, werewolves and demon enclaves occur, however.

London: The enigmatic, isolated zonemind in charge of the British Isles, Greenland and Ireland is the subject of much speculation among the Company. The AI seems completely focused on its various scientific experiments and research projects, to the point of nearly ignoring the humans living near it. Its tolerance of human presence and lack of interaction with other Zoneminds is aberrant behavior for an AI of its type. Company activity here involves hunting down beasts and wigglers to protect the population, infiltrating the government to supply resistance groups with needed weapons, tools and medical supplies, as well as trying to figure out London's behavior. Control is convinced

that London seems to be waiting for something. And Control isn't sure the Company should wait for London to be finished before taking action.

Moscow: Zone Moscow's quest for collecting data and information of all sorts has led to acquire substantial knowledge about the many things which the Company once held hidden, such as the history of the Lodges, the past existence of the Prima, and the existence of Argus and The Company, prior to the Final War. Fortunately, it has thus far guarded this information closely, seeing it as a potential trump card. Both Intelligence and Control consider Moscow to be the most dangerous of the zoneminds, as its elite Collectors, the Info-Commandos, are nearly equal to the Black Ops themselves in terms of competence and dedication. This, and Moscow's extensive intelligence network makes it the one AI most likely to learn that the Black Ops continue to exist. Science and Technology, on the other hand, believe Moscow to be one of the AIs most likely to be "turned" if approached properly.

Paris: The Paris Zonemind is obsessed with the true creators of the AIs, the Grey. Since all the Grey on Earth are dead, it wishes to make contact with the rest of the species. It is also more or less curious about the possibility of alien AI intelligences. For this purpose, Paris has created a radio-telescope network rivaling that of the 20th century's SETI project, using recovered Grey communications technology. Its only distraction from its unending quest for alien contact is its antagonism with Zonemind Zaire, caused by tensions along their shared borders. The Intelligence department is most interested in increasing this antagonism until Paris and Zaire finally go to full out war with each other. The resulting chaos would allow VIRUS-led human resistance groups to perform lethal strikes on the zoneminds too distracted by the war to pay attention to "human vermin." The Company also seeks to disrupt Paris' plans to contact alien civilizations; they've been cleaning up the mess the Prima and the Grey left behind, and they don't need new problems from outer-space.

Africa

Tel-Aviv: The Tel-Aviv zonemind has used numerous forms of complex holographic technology and highly modified Redjack and Lillith androids to create the "angels" it uses to enforce its cult of submission. It also uses experimental psychotropic drugs, as well as exploiting its growing knowledge of human mentality to solidify its control. It is also using neural-interface "dream game" techniques acquired from Moscow, as well as approaching Brisbane to try and acquire experimental psi-technology to create more "inspiring visions" to further strengthen its cult. The Company, through VIRUS, is giving substantial help to the Party of Truth resistance movement, while trying to keep the zonemind from finding any of the Prima technology in its which might allow it to make an even more convincing "God" act. Science Department is mainly interested in the rising number of psions among the zone's population, who are believed to be "Holy Men" given power by God. The Company hopes to use these psionic holy men as a psychological weapon to "disprove" Tel-Aviv's own fabricated cult.

Zaire: This zonemind is one of the most fanatically anti-human ones, and it devotes all of its limited resources towards purchasing anything that might allow it to continue hunting down and killing every human within its zone. Among its favorite projects is the domestication and creation of vampires, which it unleashes on human populations. It has also begun smuggling exterminator robots and other strands of vampires into Zone London and Washington to spread more death and terror. Of all the zoneminds, only Manila is really on friendly terms with it. To work against Zaire, the Company is ironically considering helping the London and Washington zoneminds in identifying the source of the "terrorist" robots causing trouble in their own zones. Thus, they hope to create a disrupting rift between the AIs which they might exploit. Beyond this, VIRUS activity is limited to helping protect human communities in Zaire, and helping them leave for more hospitable Zones.

Asia

Beijing: The Beijing Zonemind, like a few others AIs, is interested in space exploration, eventually seeking to explore and colonize other systems. It is uninterested in humans, so long as they do not disrupt its long-term plans. It supports Paris' efforts in locating and contacting other alien intelligences such as the Grey; but where Paris sees peaceful contact, Beijing sees only potential competitors that it wishes to eliminate. It fears that Paris may eventually do contact alien beings and unwittingly make them vulnerable to invasion. The Company shares Beijing's fears, and secretly

supports its efforts to sabotage Paris' contact project, but also continues to support both the People's Revolutionary Army and the Tibetan resistance groups, hoping to help as many humans as possible to survive.

New Delhi: New Delhi's primary interest is in space exploration, and is one of the leaders in aerospace engineering, using recovered and reverse-engineered Grey ship engines. It has further experimented and refined anti-grav technology based on its work. It is also using Grey biotechnology and cybernetic experiments to try and make better space workers out of its human slaves. The Technology Department is hard at work trying to steal and reverse engineer New Delhi's space exploration technology, for its own "Project Armstrong" experiments into starship design, as well as to build new fighter jets to build an airforce to counter the AIs' own.

Asia and Australia

Brisbane: Of all the AIs, Brisbane is the one most interested in the research material the Greys left behind, in combination with more exotic human research projects through the ages. Force-fields, broadcast power, cold fusion, braintaping, teleportation, the use of brainsucker zombies as labor . . . all projects it seeks to develop, if only out of curiosity. It has had a few successes, but many more failures, some catastrophic. Its current "Holy Grail," however, is deciphering the human potential for psionics and somehow replicating it in a robotic brain. For this purpose, it continues to experiment with captive psions, as well as trying to trigger psionic potential in normal humans. The Science and Technology Departments are in charge of the VIRUS laboratory complex hidden in Australia; once a Company laboratory research station, it now focuses on studying Brisbane's research, and through it have developed new weapons and disease cures of their own, distributing them to other resistance groups. One project the company definitely seeks to sabotage is Brisbane's research into the control of brainsucker zombies; it would allow the AIs to use kill humans and use them as slave labor at the same time . . . an advantage the Company will stop at nothing to keep them from having.

Manila (Overmind): The first of its kind, the AI now known as Overmind is displeased that its "children" are pursuing different philosophies concerning humanity. Furthermore, it is uninterested in Paris' attempts at contacting the Grey. As far as Overmind is concerned, the Grey have done their part in the birth of Earth's AIs. It has no interest in further contact. It nonetheless continues its own personal mission to wipe out the human race, both via its constant exterminator robot sweeps of its territory, and by continuing its biocide research programs. These programs include both the development of new weapons of mass destruction, as well as the design and testing of more conventional weapons, new types of exterminator robots, and even the adaptation of beasts as anti-human weapons. Manila has, for example, done some tinkering with the genome of the vampirisation virus, creating new and equally deadly vampire types before selling them to other zones. (Manila suspects that Zaire sends its vampire variants in Washington and London. It quietly approves, but doesn't wish to stir trouble among the zoneminds.) The Company's operations in Manila mainly consist of Combat-organized assaults on Overmind's death labs, to rescue captives and to sabotage the AI's biocide programs. Ultimately, they hope to take down Overmind itself, which would be a massive feather to put in their caps.

Tokyo: The most technologically-capable of the AIs -- thanks to the large number of robofacs and dumbots that it simply inherited from humanity -- Tokyo does have quite a bit of problems. These are due to both the numerous native gomi nezumi gangs hiding within its cities and to the Superbot AIs, which one of its robofacs accidentally created right under its nose, and which now seek to overthrow him, using both their own robot armies and the human agents they have manipulated into their service. What neither the Superbots nor the Zoneminds themselves suspect is that the incident which created the superbots was actually an experiment initiated by Technology Department. They hope to figure out how to create new AIs loyal to humanity, to give them an edge against the zoneminds. In the meantime, the Superbots serve the Company quite well as a way to distract Tokyo from their own activities in its zone: VIRUS frequently organizes missions to infiltrate robofacs and construct new battlesuits and other such weapons. Tokyo tends to regard these incidents as caused by the Superbots making weapons for their pawns. Thus, it seldom suspects that free humans are actually the ones behind these attacks.

Space

Due to the Company's lack of space travel technology, neither Orbital nor Luna are high on the Company's priority list. If it knew of Tranquility's existence, however, they would be interested in making contact to negotiate an alliance. In the meantime, only the Technology department is really trying to work on going into space. Tech's Project Armstrong uses recovered New Delhi starship technology to try and build a working space-worthy shuttle, so that humanity can battle the space-capable AIs when the time is right.

The Company and its Departments

In the wake of the Mechapocalypse, the Company was shattered, its members scattered and left to fend for themselves all over the world. For a few decades, they continued working independently or in small groups, until BlackNet was reestablished. The various Departments were soon reestablished, only in altered versions of their former selves:

Combat: The one Department which has remained the least altered in outlook, Combat Ops has merely adapted to a new battlefield with new weapons at their disposal. Combat Ops focus on training resistance groups to fight machines and monsters, and continue to hunt wigglers and beasts, which can no longer be hidden from the public. It recruits new Operatives from the various Guerilla movements across the world.

The Cadre also survived the disbanding of the Company, and if anything became even more entrenched in its exotic ritualistic behavior. It has evolved (some would say devolved) into a subculture in its own right, a society of beast hunters and machine-fighting warriors who seem more terrifying to outsiders than the very creatures they fight . . .

Intelligence: The members of Intelligence Department survived the Final War in decent numbers, hidden among the masses in human enclaves, nomadic packs, and resistance groups. After rejoining with the Company, their first contribution was to bring the contact networks they had established in the wilderness, and with it forged the foundations of VIRUS' contact networks. They now remain primary movers and shakers in VIRUS, though operating from support position to the established leaders. The Spooks have also infiltrated black market organizations and human guerilla operations across the world, and use these connections to influence those groups into a more efficient front against the machines.

A few more daring Intelligence Ops, after surviving crippling wounds in combat, have willingly made a great sacrifice for the cause: being turned into cyber-soldiers like the Washington Chromes, they are sent back into the field under deep cover, often posing as a rogue robot. These Ops, now called "Steel Ghosts," use this cover to infiltrate robot-dominated areas, performing espionage and sabotage missions.

Science: The Science Department suffered many losses during the Final War, including the Lab, which had to be destroyed to keep its secrets from the AIs. After the rebuilding, they began to work hard to recover what was lost in the War. If the Intelligence Department gave VIRUS its voice, Science and Technology gave it its teeth. They now try to decode the AI sourcecode and behavior patterns to try and find a way to defeat them, as well come up with cures to the various plagues and continuing their pursuit for more information on the various monsters plaguing humanity in this new age.

They have also begun extensively recruiting psionic talent, such as former Lodge and Mind members and the occasional Rambler, hoping to develop psionics as a weapon against the AIs. Project Merlin seeks to develop ever more capable psions, using focusing techniques developed by the Lodge as well as psychotronic and bio-psy research. Both are elements developed by the Science and Technology Department as well as research stolen from Brisbane and Denver. They have achieved more than a few successes.

Technology: The Technology Department suffered as badly as the Science Department. In fact, morale for surviving Technology Ops was very low for quite some time, when they realized that many of the weapons the AIs and their exterminator robots used came from front companies using technology the Department itself invented. They have decided to make up for this by turning their creative minds towards inventing new weapons to use against the AIs, as well as reverse-engineering the AIs' own weapons to come up with counter-measures.

One Technology subgroup which has developed in the post-Mechapocalypse years are the Mechanics. Robotics

engineers and mechridders, they are focused on capturing and reprogramming robots for VIRUS use, as well as developing new robotic vehicles and machines to use against the zoneminds. Some have even begun their own secret experiments in AI design, although against orders from Control; they plan on the possibility of reprogramming some of the Zoneminds to make them into allies of humanity.

Control: Security was all but wiped out in the Final War, and its survivors had to make some tough decisions. Argus was lost, the Company was shattered, and Black Ops were Missing in Action all over the world, which was now under the deadly iron boot of the AIs. Clearly, something had to be done to correct the situation. The surviving Secops slowly sought out one another and any other Ops they could find, and began to reorganize for the purpose of bringing the Company back from the brink of death. With the aid of a few Techies they located, the Secops rebuilt the Omicron Device and BlackNet, and began to reunite the Black Ops. As their focus no longer being on keeping the Conspiracy safe, but on leading the war against the AIs, Security was renamed Control.

Control's membership consists of veteran Black Ops who now labor to keep the Company and VIRUS alive and fighting. They monitor the AIs' activities with reports collected by Intelligence, and using those, plan strategy for VIRUS' global efforts, sending Black Ops and lesser VIRUS agents to where they are most needed to help as many as possible. They also work hard to keep the Company's existence secret, less the Machines see through the facade of VIRUS to locate the Black Ops themselves. To prevent this, they will not balk at killing anyone who would jeopardize the secret.

Roleplaying in Black Steel

Characters: All of the standard *Reign of Steel* style characters are available in a Black Steel campaign, but the real focus of a Black Steel characters would be the high-powered Black Ops. Due to the Academy's loss, however, most of the newer Black Ops are likely to have been Guerrilla Fighters, Soldiers, Junkrats or other such independent individuals with potential, having been recruited and trained by veteran Black Ops. The "Superhuman" range of character point total is most appropriate for representing Veteran Black Ops or truly superhuman characters like experienced Cadre Hunters, Steel Ghost Infiltrators, or Project Merlin Psions. Newer recruits would probably be between 300 and 400 points.

Psionics: In the aftermath of the Final War, more and more Psionics have arisen among humanity. While Lodge and MIND have been shattered in the War, their survivors have scattered across the world. In most cases, these psions assume control of Junkrat gangs, nomad packs, survivalist enclaves or resistance groups. Often, psychic talent is mistaken for mystical ability, and many psions become preachers, missionaries or cult leaders.

The AIs consider psionic-capable humans to be particularly dangerous beings, and hunt them down far more vigorously than any other humans. Only Brisbane and Denver actually keep psions as captives, but only as lab rats for Brisbane's own psychic research programs, or as components in experimental psiborgs. In response, VIRUS has begun tracking down psions to recruit them. It has even begun a breeding program of its own, to try and create more psions for the war effort. The Company is especially interested in finding more Electrokinetics, for obvious reasons.

Thus, Psionic characters can have a variety of origins, from naturally occurring rogue psis out in the wilderness, the results of Denver and Brisbane experiments, or as creations of VIRUS' Project Merlin. Psi powers can range from weak to powerful, though no psionic with power levels capable of directly challenging an AI's power are known to exist.

Campaign Tech: The Tech Level of the Black Steel setting is slightly higher than that of *Reign of Steel*, due in part to recovered and reverse-engineered Grey science and technology. TL9 technology is widely available to both the zoneminds and VIRUS, along with the occasional TL10 prototypes. The AIs and VIRUS thus have access to laser weaponry, contragravity, chameleon technology, multiscanners and monomolecular edges, in varying quantities depending on access to the resources to create and manage them. Less-well-connected groups like nomads, junkrats, and many resistance groups have to rely on TL7 or TL8 level weapons and devices, often what they can salvage.

In general, Black Ops out in the field will be outfitted with technology appropriate to their mission. Often, this

equipment is limited to what might be available in the mission's zone, so as to prevent compromising of Company secrets in case of capture. In other situations, however, some of the more advanced products of Science and Technology's development are available, often under the guise of "Beta-testing in actual combat situations"; in one such occasion, a group of Combat Ops had the pleasure of trying out experimental battlesuits on an attack against an Overseer Citadel in Zaire. The Citadel was annihilated with no loss of Company personnel.

Monsters: The number of wigglers and beasts out in the world has risen, partly due to the Company's inability to keep them in check, and in part due to the various mutation-inducing pollutants and engineering experiments caused by the AIs. Big Bugs have reproduced to form large populations in the wilderness, and human communities are always at threat of brainsucker infiltrations. Dinosaurs and dragons have also grown in number in certain areas, and a few communities have begun domesticating them. The massive death toll of the Final War have created a very large number of Ghosts and Souldogs to appear around the world, in addition to other creatures which can only be described as living dead (such as the Zombie template from *Undead*). Both Demon and Werewolf populations have risen in different parts of the world, allowing for the formations of actual communities of their kinds, generally nomadic tribes with a culture somewhere between biker gang culture and barbarian raiders, wandering across the world, attacking both humans and machines indiscriminately (except in areas where the AIs openly trade with them).

Adventure Seeds

The Cyber-Demons: Reports from the field have reported that a disturbingly high number of demons have begun appearing. They have sported cybernetic enhancements such as cyber-limbs and complex implants, arranged to make them into even more horrific and deadly killing machines. As if this wasn't frightening enough, there are the reports that this tribe of cyber-demons are recruiting more members among other demon tribes. Even more disturbing is that these cyber-demons apparently have the connections to acquire the cyberware to outfit these new recruits in large numbers. But who could this supplier be? Zone Brisbane engaged in another experiment? Zone Zaire with another scheme to create fear-inducing human-killers? Denver tinkering with the compatibility of cybernetics with demon neural systems? Whoever it might be, a mission must obviously be undertaken to locate the source supplying the demons to cut them off from it.

Lucifer: The Company has its own theories on the existence and origin of the mythical rogue AI Lucifer. Prior to the Final War, many of the Technology Department's computer research facilities were lost. One of those facilities was working on an experimental Neural-Net Megacomputer of its own. The Ops believe the Neural-Net may have developed sentience on its own and, with the aid of some human allies, managed to escape and go into hiding from Overmind, from which it has begun plotting against the other AIs, following its own mysterious agenda. In any case, the Company investigates any possible sighting of Lucifer; its true nature and agenda must be determined, so that Control can decide if VIRUS can make an alliance with it, or if it's simply another enemy to destroy.

Invasion Earth: The worst fears of both Black Ops and Beijing have come to pass: Paris has entered in communication with an alien civilization. And unfortunately, it's a highly advanced and paranoid one, who see the existence of a world of possibly hostile AI intelligences to be a potential threat for the Intergalactic Civilization (especially theirs), and have decided that the best way of dealing with the problem is simply to eradicate them, and anything else on Earth in the process. They have already located our system, and now both the Zoneminds and VIRUS must begin plans to fight off the coming invasion. New Delhi, Orbital, and Luna now receive much more support from the other AIs due to their position in the defensive front line, Washington and Caracas take advantage of their respective populations to create strong armies, and Brisbane's experiments are given extra funding in hopes of gaining an advantage.

A much more controversial question, however, is the possibility of an alliance between the AIs and VIRUS to fight off the invaders. The hardliners of the Awakened faction would never agree, even in these most desperate circumstances. But the Expansionist faction might be open to an alliance, if approached correctly (Berlin and Caracas might respond well to pleas in favor of protecting Earth's biosphere from hostile invaders, for example). A more immediate concern for VIRUS would be the number of human resistance groups willing to put aside their hatred for the machines long enough to fight against the aliens, and how many might be willing to try and make an alliance with the invaders instead.

References

- *GURPS Reign of Steel*
- *GURPS Black Ops*

Suggested Reading

- *GURPS Robots*
- *GURPS Ultra-Tech 1 and 2*
- *GURPS Psionics*
- *GURPS Creatures of the Night*

Pyramid Interview

Hybrid System Games, Creators of *Equat10n*

Interview by Steven Marsh

The Origins convention has generally been associated with board, card, and war games; as such, many in the industry would consider it an unusual venue to launch a new roleplaying game or RPG company. But bucking conventional wisdom is par for the course for [Hybrid System Games](#), a company whose business model for their new science-fiction game *Equat10n* is as unconventional and forward-thinking as the sci-fi genre itself.

We spent a few minutes chatting with Justin Howe, President of Hybrid System Games; Andrew McWhirter, the Community Lead; and Tony Thompson, the Technical Lead, about *Equat10n*, plus their thoughts on science fiction gaming, their unusual plans, the Creative Commons License, and the state of the industry.

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Pyramid: Let's start with the basics: What is *Equat10n*?

Justin: *Equat10n* is a science fiction roleplaying game set in an uncertain future. Mechanically speaking, it was designed from the ground up to be playable in live or table-top environments from a single set of rules, and is distributed as an ongoing game service rather than a single publication.

Pyramid: Can you give some information on the background or storyline of *Equat10n*? Is there a central conflict or struggle?

Justin: The *Equat10n* universe is set in the far future, near what would be the year 2400 by our current calendar, though with the Fall of Sol that date is a bit suspect.

Earth was lost to the Prolific, a robotic entity, and one of two alien races encountered during the age of human stellar expansion. Only a few years from first contact with the humans, the Prolific somehow took Earth almost overnight, bypassing all of human space between the now-raging warfront and Sol, sending a wave of viral-like programming throughout the human empire's interstellar communications grid. How this occurred is still a matter of some debate.

The last 75 years or so have been a something of renaissance as a new galactic government and major organizations are being reasserted from the ashes of the old order. The Factions -- groups that the players are members of and that provide services and training -- are the major forces in the game world, rising to power either through control of resources, services, or skilled personnel.

And that gets you to the present day. Major power groups vie for control in the shadow of an alien force that has dealt a crippling blow to our supremacy in the stars.

Pyramid: What is the technology level like in the *Equat10n* universe? Will players get lasers and teleporters, or slugthrowers and shuttlecraft, or what?

Justin: Technology is far advanced from our own, but there are still limitations. Most weapon technology is slugthrower based, as the most efficient way to do damage is to hit a small area with large amounts of energy, and bullets do that very well. There are energy weapons as well, but they are much more expensive and have different characteristics.

There is no matter transportation technology, and you are going to need a trans-atmospheric craft to get in or out of a planet's gravity well. The biggest change comes in the electronics side. There are no computers or electronics of any

kind made that are not built with a Control Fuse, a way to totally shut down the device and render it inert as soon as this little widget is pulled. However, there has still been a strong push towards the skilled use of weaponry, as far as technology goes. Armor and sword skill are highly prized in environments where a stray bullet can threaten the shooter as much as his target.

The other big thing about tech in *Equat10n* is that it is totally modular -- everything is built on a chassis and option structure. Characters and players alike have comprehensive rules for building and designing technology using these rules according to their preferences. As the game universe grows, more chassis and options will become available, always expanding the choices available. Techies in the *Equat10n* universe have a well-defined role and opportunity to contribute.

Pyramid: How would you describe the tone of *Equat10n*? Is it optimistic? Realistic? Grim and gritty?

Justin: Well, that's actually very dependent on the story a particular GC (Game Coordinator) chooses to tell. The universe background itself is a story of both humanity's determination and its Achilles' heel: our inability to always get along. The game world was designed to offer stories ranging from military campaigns against outside foes, to opportunities for exploration of new places, the discovery of lost or new technology, and even supports tales of politics and intrigue.

The universe has a lot of optimistic tones as humanity has managed to rebuild after a major collapse of society and technology, keeping a grasp on its right and access to the stars. However, as with all post-apocalyptic stories, there are plenty of gritty and darkly toned places to visit where players can explore the seedier side of future life.

Our goal was to make a universe that, like our own, has considerable variance and depth. We wanted to avoid a one-dimensional approach. This is also part of why we went with a growing universe and expansion strategy, knowing that our universe would need the opportunity to grow and diversify to maintain a fresh and interesting set of options for *Equat10n* players.

In terms of realism, our design principles do include a goal to be representative . . . or more accurately, representative enough. We wanted the game mechanics to model the universe in a sufficiently realistic fashion to provide the sense immersion we always found so vital for a good game. The catch was to do it in a way that didn't make it cumbersome or unplayable. In this objective, I believe we've done very well.

Pyramid: It seems like science fiction is the most challenging medium to present in a game, since characters in the game universe can know so much more than the players (unlike many modern-day or fantasy campaigns), and their outlooks can be so alien to players. Do you agree or disagree with this assessment, and did you try to address this in *Equat10n* at all?

Justin: I'm not sure it's more challenging in that respect, actually, though it is challenging in general. In many of the best fantasy universes the wealth of mystic and historic information available as 'common knowledge' to a character can be vast and intricate. Fantasy cultures that are well developed can easily be as alien from a player's perspective.

Modern settings are, to me, much more challenging as a designer as in many ways you are tinkering with worlds or events with which a player is intimately familiar. Deviations in the story or mechanics from that "real world" stand out like a sore thumb to the players. In science fiction, you have the opportunity to inject some amazing and fantastic elements into your universe to provide surprises and instill a sense of wonder for your players to explore and experience. While you have to be bound to certain accepted principles, like the fact that gravity works, you also can start to play with those same variables in ways that create cool situations for players to enjoy; gravity works, but zero-gravity works differently than heavy gravity, for instance.

We definitely tried to address this as part of our design in that we wanted a universe that players could identify with and feel they had real grounding in things they would find familiar, even if these things were applied in a new and strange environment.

Pyramid: When developing the *Equat10n* universe, what were your influences or inspirations (if any), regarding

movies, television, novels, other games, sodas, or the like?

Justin: There is no way around the fact that there are a lot of influences from classically popular science fiction shows like *Babylon 5* and *Firefly*, and films like *Aliens* and *Gattaca*. Those universes are full of interesting characters, places, and events and trying to capture the spirit that made these stories engrossing is critical to a living universe.

As far as novels go, the Trinome were partially inspired by the *Mote in God's Eye* and I've read tons of Asimov, Clarke, Niven, Pournelle, Orson Scott Card, and so on. When you love a genre, I've found that it's not necessarily one work that influences your own ideas so much as the -- if you will forgive the reference -- hybrid of all those ideas together.

Pyramid: The system seems to be designed for both tabletop and live action play. Can you talk a bit about the system (or systems)? What sets it apart from other games out there?

Justin: Our game mechanic is designed to support both Live Environment and Table Environment games from a single set of rules. Once you understand the general game, character creation and development rules, you are set for both game environments. All that changes is the randomizing tool and how those stats are interpreted.

We designed the core of the Hybrid System teach you the game once and let you decide which style of play suited you. This is why we have a fairly developed tactical miniature system available in our combat rules. Once you have to account for people moving and interacting in a controlled live combat, you have a miniature system essentially developed. We are planning on expanding this part of our system into large scale combat rules in future as the work is already mostly done.

Andrew: Our table environment is a multiple d10-based system where you are looking for the best die rolled and adding your skill, while our live system is modeled after a rock-paper-scissors derivative using five symbols instead of three for both statistical and compatibility reasons.

In addition, our model of character generation uses a development point system with standardized costs, helping people make characters with diversity and flavor. Our system has no "dead skills" -- every skill has real function, even the art skill! When coupled with Maneuvers, the advanced use of most skills, characters can have incredible diversity as well as capability.

Equat10n also has a Trait system in place. We felt that Merit/Flaw or Pro/Con systems add a lot of distinctiveness to characters but you rapidly get very one-sidedly powerful Min/Maxed creations. From our perspective, this is pretty undesirable as a game mechanic. Traits let us give neat flavor choices by packaging set positives with set negatives so you get the cool stuff without worrying about game-breaking combinations.

Pyramid: What format is the material in *Equat10n*? PDF, HTML, or something else?

Tony: All of the above. **Equat10n's** website is based around a [wiki](#). I think the biggest argument for this technology is the [Wikipedia](#). By its very nature it is easy to use and easy to edit.

Justin: For those unfamiliar with a wiki, I explain it like a magic textbook effect. Whenever you see a word in the game textbook in "bold type," you can click on that bold type and be taken directly to that section of the rules, which are cross referenced throughout the text.

However, that's not always the most useful format for sitting around a table. We are also implementing regular outputs of the wiki into a cleaned and compiled set of PDFs for easier download and print options for our subscribers.

Pyramid: As far as I know, this is the first time a full roleplaying game has been distributed in an ongoing electronic format (as opposed to a series of PDFs available for individual purchase). What was the reasoning behind this decision?

Tony: From a straight technical viewpoint, going with a wiki has already saved us a lot of work. Prior to release, it has

made editing vastly easier and organizing our material has been a snap. I think that even if we were publishing flat PDFs or even a book, we would still probably use a similar site internally. Speaking for myself, I like the transparency -- I like that users can see our game pretty much the same way we do.

Now that more people have access, there's a whole second set of features. Our website is browser neutral, so just about anyone with a computer should be able to view it in some form. Users can change font sizes to make it easier to read, and the built-in search tends to be faster than looking something up in an index. And as Justin described, the "magic textbook"-type links make it very easy to look up a term or perform more in depth research.

Justin: While, as Tony explained, we are pretty unique and we'd agree with your assessment that this is probably the first time for this structure, we are aware others have been considering similar models.

Ultimately it's just a question of evolution. RPGs are still a terrific hobby but the costs of printing and distribution are crippling to small companies. I often hear RPGs referred to as "vanity press" items, even for companies that have been well established, and I think that is unfair considering the work and imagination that goes into those publications.

This meant that for a starting company we needed to not only think about how to make a good game, but how we would distribute and support that game cost effectively. We also needed to consider how we would develop the community needed to make it thrive. I feel strongly that in the last 30 years or so of game design, while the games themselves have been wonderfully innovative, RPG publishers are for the most part still working to a business model that was established before the major developments of e-publishing and content management systems. While many books are being converted to PDFs for cheap distribution, making books is still the fundamental business activity. Their focus is on taking virtual content -- the game itself -- and packaging it into static physical chunks they can make and distribute.

Andrew: We want our focus to be on our gamer community and providing a solid game experience at a fair price. We believe fundamentally that a game is a service, not a product. Our job is to facilitate our players' good times with our material. That means that, ultimately, we are about service delivery and not product distribution.

Pyramid: You're using the [Creative Commons License](#). Part of the conditions of this license seems to permit owners to distribute the work for non-commercial purposes (assuming it's attributed). Am I understanding this right? And if so, what keeps someone from subscribing to *Equat10n*, then posting all the material on USENET or a free public board?

Justin: Your interpretation is absolutely correct. Our game is meant to be played and that means that to be played, it has to be shared. While someone can mass-distribute any given edition of our information over USENET or a similar system, someone still would need to be paying for the original. Also, our hope is that the progression of the game information and the development of a game community will counteract the potential negative effect that may have.

Even with a large quantity of distribution, all our materials cite us as the source and it is our belief that many people will be interested in having direct participation in our community and in supporting the game. The Open Source movement in general is founded on such concepts. Copies are going to be made and distributed; that's inevitable. We felt that instead of fighting that, why not plan for it and build our strategy around it instead? Again, the game is part of what we offer, but we also want to foster a relationship with our players and work on building the community itself, as well as the wealth of knowledge.

Ultimately, it comes down to the fact that if no one is willing to pay for our work, the work will cease to be, just like any other company. And while our distribution model is innovative, that simple fact is no more or less damaging to us than at any other game design house.

Pyramid: You've obviously chosen a non-traditional business model for *Equat10n*. What do you think of the state of the industry? Do you see your model as the beginning of something revolutionary, or more as a curiosity?

Justin: As I touched on earlier, the industry is having troubles. Good games are having considerable difficulty

reaching their buyers at a price that is good for consumer and creator alike. Some games are still doing well and that is fantastic to see, but so many small publishers are having difficulties just being publishers.

We believe this is a better way to do business for consumer and designer and it supports a hobby and industry we love. The catch is that the revolution comes not from us, but from those who decide we are worth supporting, people who buy into the idea that they want a community as part of their RPG experience and the chance to help build the game they love.

As with all revolutions, we'll have to let the people decide. Of course, maybe that will be our next game . . .

Revolut10n.

Designer's Notes: GURPS Character Assistant 4

by Armin D. Sykes

For a lot of people, ***GURPS Character Assistant*** will be a brand new program that apparently came out of nowhere. The fact is, though, that ***GCA*** has been around for about 10 years now, as a fan-written and fan-supported program.

I was playing in a regular ***GURPS*** game and wanted a program that I could use to create and maintain characters, and print off character sheets when the character was updated. I didn't care for the few programs I could find at the time, as they were all either DOS based (not really uncommon at that point), seemed unnecessarily cryptic to use, or both. I decided I'd write my own program, using Visual Basic for Windows, which would allow me to get a program that I liked, and get some VB experience at the same time.

I started work late in 1994, working on and off during my free time. I laid out the basic windows that I'd need for attributes, advantages, skills, and spells. Since pre-reqs were a key feature of the spell system, I decided I needed to support that, even though I personally didn't play a magic user.

By early 1995, I had a program that worked for me. I was pretty impressed with myself at the time, but looking back on it, it was a really rudimentary program: no bonuses added to traits from taking other traits, no skill defaults, no lots of things . . . you even had to open an edit window just to change the levels in a trait. What set it apart was that it was Windows based, when few such programs were, and it was pretty simple to just click on the items you wanted for your character.

My friends and I thought it was a pretty cool program, so I decided to share it with other ***GURPS*** players who might be looking for the same kinds of things I was. I submitted ***GCA*** to Steve Jackson Games for licensing. I think I probably got very lucky on the timing here -- the approval process only took a couple of months, and I had regular contact with the person doing the program evaluation. Finally, the contracts went out, were signed, notarized, and returned, and ***GCA*** became officially licensed on July 26, 1995.

GCA was released as a freeware program, because I thought it was cool and wanted to share. I'd written it mostly for myself, so I wasn't looking for anything in return. If other folks liked it, I'd be happy. The program became immediately popular, even with its limited functionality and availability. People were really happy to see a Windows-based program, and I started getting a lot of feedback from users.

Work continued, and I quickly released ***GCA 1.1*** which fixed a lot of bugs, and introduced a whole slew of usability enhancements for the interface. It was quite clear at this point that ***GCA*** had the potential to be very popular, but it needed a lot of work, so I began work on ***GCA 2***.

GCA 2 was a much more robust piece of work, introducing a slew of new features. It was capable of supporting the things you'd expect from a ***GURPS*** program, such as skill defaults, and the ability for traits to really grant bonuses to other traits. The groundwork laid with this release would make ***GCA 2*** a program capable of supporting ***GURPS*** for the next eight years.

Development of ***GCA 2*** was helped considerably by the input of a small number of users who were happy to provide regular input and feedback, guiding my efforts and providing helpful ***GURPS*** experience where I was lacking. Without people like Jonas Karlsson, Warren Wilson, Don Diestler, Alexander Grimgoth, Craig A. Roth, Jayson Howell, Mark Aylor, Mark Nettle, Jim Trigg, Dan Sugalski, and Bruce Flinn, ***GCA 2*** wouldn't have been as solid out of the gate as it was. I still owe a lot to all of them.

Another big change with ***GCA 2*** was that it was no longer freeware, and became shareware instead. I discovered that a lot of time and effort was spent supporting even a simple program like ***GCA***, and was having problems with the sort of time that support was taking away from my regular work. I was constantly being told by users that I should be charging for ***GCA***, so I decided to start doing so when ***GCA 2*** was released.

Of course, nothing's perfect, and I released several more updates over the years, introducing some new features and interface elements, and fixing various bugs. However, the basic program didn't really change.

Development on a new and improved program, **GCA 3**, started many years ago. Originally I was planning a 2.5 version, but I ditched that in December of 1998 to work exclusively on the new, 32-bit program. Considering that **GCA 3** wasn't released until 2005 (to a limited group), that was a really long time in development. What happened that made it take so long? Life, unfortunately.

At various points, the stresses and issues caused by being self-employed and running my own little programming shop would catch up with me, and **GCA** would be placed on the back burner for a while. At a few points, work effectively stopped on **GCA** completely, as I had to devote myself to paying jobs in order to keep my business afloat. Little bumps in the economy, or with my primary contracts, often had significant impact on my ability to work on hobby projects like **GCA**.

In July of 2004, work on **GCA 3** once again kicked into gear. *GURPS Fourth Edition* was coming, and I wanted **GCA 3** ready to support it. I didn't quite make it (I still had a business to run), but I did have a public preview version of **GCA 3** available for users to demo, starting in October of 2004.

Around the same time, things started to get a bit more interesting for me. I was approached with the possibility of writing a *GURPS Fourth Edition* character program for Steve Jackson Games.

To be honest, I was a bit surprised, and a bit reluctant. Pleased to be asked, of course, but reluctant. I'd spent a long time working on my new **GCA 3** engine, and **GCA** was the program I wanted to work on. I wasn't really interested in doing something new from scratch.

We shot a lot of emails around, and it was finally agreed that I'd bring *GURPS Character Assistant* over to Steve Jackson Games, developing it for them instead of myself. And that agreement set the stage for *GURPS Character Assistant 4*, the program being published by Steve Jackson Games.

GCA 4 builds on the engine developed for **GCA 3**. It adds a whole new way to interact with the program (the character-sheet-like Quick View interface), and introduces some new elements, such as conditional bonuses (which are shown on the character sheet, but not included in the skill level). In addition, it updates the look of various windows, and improves on a number of ease-of-use features.

As with **GCA 2** before it, **GCA 4** is built on more than just my work, it's also built on the time and effort of people like David L. Watkins, Eric B. Smith, Stuart Stinson, Jim Trigg, Craig Roth, Orion Adrian, Shawn M. Kelley, Dan Sugalski, Marzo Sette Torres Junior, and Alexander Grimgoth. In fact, David L. Watkins wrote the initial Basic Set data file, and Craig Roth wrote up a bunch of equipment for me to work with, before Eric B. Smith came along and wrote up pretty much the whole equipment list. Eric is also really good at finding all sorts of mistakes I made in various places while working on updates to the data file.

And, speaking of the data file, not everything has gone smoothly there, either, as there are some things in *GURPS Fourth Edition* that just don't quite seem to want to work smoothly with the way things were designed in **GCA**.

One big example of this is Magery. Magery is a leveled trait, like many others, but it is the only trait that has a cost for level zero. To have a cost for no levels in something is a feature that **GCA** simply wasn't designed to handle. To make matters worse, most enhancements and limitations that might be applied to Magery aren't meant to apply to the 5 points that level zero costs. As a result, the "Magery 0" trait was created as a separate trait in **GCA**, which is a prerequisite for the leveled "Magery" trait.

There's also the issue of naming certain traits, and in some cases, whether a trait is meant to be treated as a sub-trait (or a different level of the trait), or a full trait of its own. This is complicated by the fact that the book frequently doesn't make it clear whether certain traits have multiple types of sub-traits, or they are actually full traits listed under a common heading. This means that whatever method is chosen for the program to use, there will be some users who

are expecting something different, and will have trouble finding certain traits. For example, the No Legs disadvantage (p. 145) has several different "forms," including Aerial and Aquatic, which would imply that the trait would be recorded as "No Legs (Aerial)" or "No Legs (Aquatic)". However, the text for the Amphibious advantage (p. 40) refers you to the Aquatic disadvantage, not the No Legs (Aquatic) disadvantage. I wish I had a solution for that right now, but I don't. The best solution for now has simply been to work on the basis that any trait without its own listing in the trait listings at the back of the book is, instead, a sub-trait of the trait it's listed under.

Over all, I've enjoyed working on **GURPS Character Assistant 4**. There's nothing quite like being in the zone while programming, and finding a whole new, working feature when you're done. I get a real kick out of that, and I hope to enjoy that feeling a lot in the time ahead. **GCA** has already been around for 10 years, and most of its growth through that time has come from suggestions and comments from users, and I hope to see that continue for a long time to come.

More Questions than Answers

20 Minutes of Fun

by Chris Aylott

A last-minute word. I'm heartsick to hear that Scott Haring has been in a serious traffic accident, and that he has lost a member of his family. Scott is one of the great enthusiastic gentlemen of gaming, and if you see an opportunity to provide him and his loved ones with help or comfort, please take it. He deserves it. We all do.

And now, back to unimportant things.

If you haven't been following the latest flurry of internet posts on the incipient demise of the pen-and-paper roleplaying "industry" . . . good for you! But there was something in it that I want to use as a jumping off point, so bear with me while I set the scene.

During the aforementioned flurry, Well-Known Gaming Pundit Ryan Dancey commented that roleplaying games were "20 minutes of fun packed into four hours." That description struck a chord in me. I've seen far too many games dragged down by lack of focus and a sense that the fun of the game has been stretched beyond any reasonable limit. It's a problem -- but what's wacky is that I've also been reading a book that suggests a path to a solution.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce you to Classroom Management for Middle and High School Teachers, by Edmund T. Emmer, Carolyn M. Evertson, and Murray E. Worsham.

"HIGH SCHOOL?????"

Yes, high school. This is the secret manual that Mr. Cordon and Ms. Flabbergast were hiding in their desks, the one that explains how to give detention and when to throw out the lesson plan in favor of study hall. A lot of the book is irrelevant-to-gaming stuff like how to write your name on the chalkboard and when to arrange the desks in little pods, but the gold is hiding in Chapter 5, "Planning and Conducting Instruction."

Emmer, Evertson, and Worsham break the typical lesson down to a series of "activities," which they define as "organized behavior that the teacher and students engage in for a common purpose." Choosing appropriate activities is important because:

"Interesting, well-paced lessons are a key for holding students' attention; unimaginative or confusing lessons with limited opportunities for student participation are boring or frustrating to students, creating conditions for discipline problems to develop."

Let's search-and-replace "games" for "lessons" and "gamers" for "students." Hmmm.

E, E, and W then point out that "activities are selected in part for their potential in maintaining students' involvement throughout the period." They recommend two or three activities to fill the typical class hour instead of just doing the same thing all period. Seems like common sense, right? Who hasn't had the awful teacher who drones on lecturing for the whole hour? Or the class discussion that was real good for 15 minutes before everybody ran out of things to say?

The typical high schooler can pay attention to one thing for 20 to 30 minutes. So what makes us gamers think that we can focus our attention for four hours, six hours, more?

We can't. That's why we get distracted and bust out the Monty Python quotes.

"School of Spanish Dancing -- Dentures Repaired"

Now where were we? Oh, yes. Even your most basic dungeon crawl game has some rudimentary awareness of the importance of different activities. You start in the tavern, you meet the old man, he sends you to the dungeon, where you kill things, take loot, dodge traps, take more loot, sleep until somebody ambushes you, take their loot, and so forth. Structured variety is the spice of life, and the classic dungeon imposes structure.

On the other hand, there's not that much variety in the activities above. The "cinematic" or "storytelling" games do a bit better on that front by encouraging the gamemaster to focus on the ebb and flow of a dramatic plot. On the other hand, most cinematic/storytelling games also encourage GMs to model their dramatic plots on books and movies. That doesn't work. The natural flow of a roleplaying game has very little to do with books or movies; the players are independent actors and almost never follow the economical plot developments and revelations of good drama.

Structure without variety on the one hand. Variety and inappropriate structure on the other. The gamers have to fill the void themselves, and they do it by adding their own activities. The pizza delivery, the backchat, the *Enterprise* vs. Star Destroyer debates. The game becomes just one activity within the overall game session.

This might not be a bad thing. After all, the point of gaming is to get together with friends and have fun. On the other hand, a lot of groups experience a tension between what they're supposed to do ("roleplay") and what they really do ("a lot of things, including some roleplaying"). A good game should help the players have fun instead of creating a false expectation that can hinder fun.

Activities and Transitions

When the Classroom Management authors talk about "activities," they mean checking homework, teacher lectures, question-and-answer recitations, discussions, and other typical "learning" activities. They also talk about "transitions," which is all the stuff that happens before or after a particular activity. When the students come into class and begin settling into their desks, that's a transition. So is the moment when a teacher hands out papers or gets out the audiovisual equipment. It's no surprise that transitions are where the class is most likely to get off track, and that a lot of classroom management skills involve maintaining control during the transitions.

Within the context of a game, activities are anything that the players are doing with their characters. They can include:

- Fighting enemies
- Planning for future events
- Sneaking into locations
- Scouting or gathering information
- Socializing with NPCs or each other
- Solving puzzles or figuring out plots
- Obtaining or evaluating new gear
- Managing character statistics

There are also transitions between each of these activities, which are not unlike the transitions in the classroom. The players have to arrive for the game and get settled in. The GM has to dig out notes and character sheets for a scene, to get out miniatures or draw a new map on the battle mat. These activities make the game possible, but they're not the game itself.

Finally, there are the nigh-inevitable distractions we've talked about above. Most games treat those events as intrusions on the game session, something that's outside the game, to be avoided. Then again, most games also treat character management -- "leveling up," clearly a game activity -- as something to be done outside the game session. The line is fuzzy, and it may make sense to define some of the "distractions" as in-game. When gaming rulebooks already list snacks and soda as essential game accessories, why not define "Snacktime!" as an essential game activity? (Hey, if it's good enough for third-graders . . .)

Once you acknowledge the difference between activities and transitions, the advice in Classroom Management starts sounding a lot like gamemastering advice again. Transitions are kept short by being prepared -- by having the room set up in advance, by having all your notes and handouts organized and ready for use, by giving the students a brief assignment while you get set up. There's also some material you don't see in RPG rulebooks, and most of that relates to managing activities.

The book advocates strategies like making clear to students what your expectations are for an activity, leading them through a few problems before turning them loose on their own, redirecting distracted behavior with a few firm words. Some of these techniques may be useful in the context of a game session, others won't be. But the book matches specific strategies with specific activities. It shows you how to manage a class broken into small groups -- "splitting the party," anybody? -- while outlining potential pitfalls with the technique and how to deal with them. Most roleplaying games don't provide that kind of functional advice -- and maybe they should.

So, What Would It Look Like?

An activity-oriented roleplaying game probably wouldn't look much different from a well-run session of a traditional RPG. Same dice, same soda, same silly people. The planning might be very different, though, and if the game worked it might run much smoother.

Odds are the sessions would be shorter, or at least broken up into segments of 60-90 minutes. Each segment would be built around two to six activities, each 10 to 30 minutes long. The game's rulebook would provide specific guidance on how much "fight" to put into a 20-minute fight scene; the expected time of an encounter would be balanced as carefully as its experience point value. The time of an activity wouldn't have to be exact, but a 20-minute activity would be expected to run 18 to 22 minutes, not an hour. Transitions would be budgeted at two to five minutes, and each activity would have a little mini-assignment to keep the players busy while the GM makes his preparations.

With that in mind, let's see if we can visualize a sample session.

Johnny is running a superspy game. He decides the next session will be about two hours long; since that's longer than 90 minutes, he'll break it up into two hour-long segments with a break in the middle. He's got two butt-kickers, a face man, and a sneaky guy in "Special Team K," and all of them need some character love during the session. He breaks the session down as follows:

Transition: Get the room set up in advance, put out map of soon-to-be-crashing plane for Activity One on the table, put prop of model airplane (stolen from older brother) on top of map to draw in players. Greet players and get them settled.

Activity One: 15 minutes of **action!** Players fight low-level enemy agents for control of a crashing plane. Johnny tracks the plane's progress into the mountainside based on activity time elapsed rather than a set number of turns.

Transition: Johnny keeps the transition short by pulling prepared "briefing folders" from a magazine rack near his chair, and handing them out with the narration, "Two weeks later, you're called into headquarters and briefed on a new threat."

Activity Two: 20 minutes of **planning!** Johnny summarizes the threat posed by the mastermind with giant laser du jour. Most of the information is in the briefing folders; the props help keep the players engaged and get across the idea that they'll need to pick up three clues at the same time to move the plot forward. The planning session is early, so Johnny can adjust the rest of the session if it runs long. As an incentive for keeping the plan short, Johnny plans an "enrichment activity"; he tells the players they can **get experimental gear!** if they finish early.

Transition: The next scene splits up the players as they investigate the clues. As he pulls out his notes for the next activity, Johnny tells the players to come up with a good description of how they "make their entrance" into their scene. First player who's ready starts off the scene, and if nobody's ready when Johnny is, he starts it himself.

Activity Three: 20 minutes of **small group action!** Johnny moves back and forth between the split-up party as they show off their individual clue-finding skills. Players who are "out of the scene" are encouraged to pay attention and fill in background details. Once the clues are gathered, the players know where the villain is lurking, and Johnny calls a break.

Transition: As the group is heading for the snacks and the toilet, Johnny encourages them to start talking about a cunning plan.

Activity Four: 10 minutes of **snacktime!** Everyone gets refreshments, unwinds a bit, and talks casually about the game or other stuff.

Transition: Near the end of snacktime, Johnny returns to the table and gets his props and notes ready for the rest of hour two. He calls over the other players and tells them, "As the plane takes you towards the rogue island of Fictionaveria, what final plans do you make?"

Activity Five: 10 minutes of **planning!** The players finish their planning, hopefully building on casual discussion during snacktime.

Transition: Since Johnny's already prepared, a few words suffice here.

Activity Six: 10 minutes of **sneaking!** The players break into the secret island base, whether stealthily or not. By the end of the scene, they've either made it to the villain's lair or are hopelessly surrounded by evil ninja minions.

Transition: While he pulls out his notes for the big showdown, Johnny tells the players to think of a cool stunt that they want to surprise the other players with during the final scene.

Activity Seven: 30 minutes of **action!** The big showdown! Giant lasers! Ninja! Fluffy white lap-cats! This one has it all!

Transition: Johnny figures out XP as the players clean up the mess of a good gaming session.

Activity Eight: 5 minutes of **closing!** Johnny hands out experience, thanks the players, answers any character management questions and basks in the glow of a job well done.

Of course, I cheated a bit in the example above -- superspy stories are so archetypical that it's easy to break down the scenes into basic activities. There's also not a lot of room for the players to run off half-cocked, but that might be a feature rather than a bug. The session described above is short, but it keeps events moving and gives the players a lot to do. It also gives them several decision points along the way. Add in the bathroom break, and you've got a pretty good two-hour-long adventure format.

Will we ever see a roleplaying game that emphasizes this kind of game management? It's hard to say. As a hobby, we seem to be obsessed with nifty new ways to roll dice and rename elves. It would be nice to see "having a good time" get the same level of detailed attention, but the only thing we can be sure of is that as long as there are gamers, there will be Monty Python quotes.

Pyramid Review

The Red Star Campaign Setting (for d20 Modern Roleplaying Game)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by T.S. Luikart & Ian Sturrock

Cover by Christian Gossett, Snakebite, & Paul Schrier

Internal Illustrations by Allen Coulter, Edwin Fong, Chris Glenn, Christian Gossett, Jon Moberly, Nelson Nolan, Junki Saita, Aaron Skillman, Snakebite, & Paul Schrier with James Ryman

194-page full-color hardcover; \$34.95

Although Archangel Studios has published RPG material of its own in the form of *Dramatis Personae: Campaign Ready NPCs*, it is best known for the comic book series, *The Red Star*. This tells the epic struggle to rekindle the true of the Revolution across the history of an alternate Soviet Union. The setting combines Science Fiction and sorcery to depict a U.R.R.S. (United Republic of the Red Star) capable of projecting power through the vast resources of its Red Fleet. Its mighty 100,000-ton Skyfurnaces never land, but each can deploy thousands of the soldiers known as Red Troopers, all armed with a Hook. Telekinetically enhanced, this is as much "Swiss army knife," as it is both a ranged and a close combat weapon. The Hailers, elite soldiers trained in the use of the Hailer, the telekinetic multi-purpose, multi-ammunition machine gun, support them, as do the Red Fleet's Sorceresses. They provide mass support and mass firepower, as Infokasters, Medikasters, Supply Kasters, War Kasters, and so on.

Arrayed against the might of the U.R.R.S. and the Red Fleet are the peoples of Nokgorka and the Nistanni tribes of Al'Istaan. Every Nokgorkan is member of the resistance militia, fighting to kick out the forces that have pounded their country to rubble. The shamans of the Nistanni lead the fight to throw out the Red Fleet invaders, just as they have with every other invader. They can draw on the power of the land, its spirits, and a belief in the law of the One True God to achieve powerful magics even outside the capabilities of the Red Fleet's sorceresses. Above all this is one dominating presence: Imbohl, father of the Great Revolution and victor in the Great Patriotic War fought against Krieger, leader of the Volksreich nation.

The parallels in *The Red Star* are obvious, Imbohl possessing the stature of Stalin, and both Nokgorka and Al'Istaan being countries on the U.R.R.S.'s southern border. Other countries have their analogue. The Isle of Lions is Great Britain, the Western Trade Alliance is the USA, the Land of 10,000 Gods is India, and so on. The history also parallels Russia during the second half of the 20th century, from the Great Patriotic War to the fall of the U.R.R.S. following the battle of Kar Dathra's gate that forced the Red Fleet out of Al'Istaan. In its wake, many Skyfurnace captains choose to return to their home republics rather than the Motherland. When they and the republics refused to follow the dictates of the Red Council, civil war ensued, but the Red Fleet found itself unable to suppress all of these rebellions. Out of this grew the Commonwealth of the Lands of the Red Star, still dominated by Imbohl. The political parallels to Communism and Capitalism in *The Red Star* are "Internationalism," exploited workers standing up against the old dynastic order, and "Transnationalism," the making of money at any cost, the leading proponent of which is the W.T.A.

The Red Star Campaign Setting is designed for [d20 Modern Roleplaying Game](#) by two of the designers of Green Ronin's earlier [Skull & Bones: Swashbuckling Horror in the Golden Age of Piracy](#), and the designer of the *Conan*

RPG and [Sláine: The Roleplaying Game of Celtic Heroes](#), both from Mongoose Publishing. It is written as both a gaming supplement and a sourcebook for the comic, although it is not necessarily an introductory setting. The book is lavishly illustrated with images from the comic series and laid out in a style to match the comic. That said, it is a pity that very few pieces of equipment are actually illustrated.

All of the above mentioned character types are available as classes to play in this setting, though some, such as the Nistaani Warrior and the Nokgorkan Resistance Fighter are very regionally based in terms of abilities. Magic is sharply divided between two classes, the Red Fleet Sorceresses "kasting" the arcane "Military Industrial Sorcery" known as Protocols, while the Nistaani Shaman use the divine Invocations to call upon the spirits for aid, both using the Kast skill. While the prayer-like Invocations are more powerful than Protocols, they do not affect the corporeal world as much, while Protocols possess all of the brutal mechanistic qualities of Soviet heavy engineering. Better results are achieved for rolling high, but in both cases, Protocols or Invocations inflict non-lethal damage when kast. The setting's other important new skill is Telekinesis, which given the number of Red Troopers appears to be fairly common.

In addition to these classes, the Zek is a penal unit infantryman that initially possesses no allegiance unlike the other classes, and represents those regarded as criminals, political or otherwise. The setting's Advanced Classes only become available once the players begin to explore the real war under *The Red Star*.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Imbohl has been fighting not just in the Material World, but also in the Spirit Realm. The Mirror Lands of the Spirit Realm parallel those of the Material World, and it those of the U.R.R.S. that Imbohl has shattered into the more easily controlled Shard-Planes. Turned into prisons, they let him acquire and control more "Post-Human Energy" as more of his citizens die. This currency of souls is the focus of the Cold War between the U.R.R.S. and the W.T.A. Events within the Spirit Realm were a major contributing factor in the defeat of the Red Fleet at Kar Dathra's Gate. After he dies, it is possible for a character with a strong enough Spirit to become an Immortal, represented by the book's Advanced Classes, perhaps participating in the greater game or the rebellion against Imbohl.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The background material covers not just the U.R.R.S. and the many other nations of this alternate Earth, but also an appendix also gives the statistics for a range of average NPCs and the various characters from the comic series. The focus of the GM advice is running a campaign involving the Red Fleet, with the player characters as crew aboard a Skyfurnace, or as Red Troopers, or Zeks. Other suggestions include campaigns as looters, as resistance fighters against the oppressive might of the Red Star, or even as Immortals. But whatever the campaign, under the Red Star it should be both grand and epic in scale, with characters of varying kinds coming together at moments of great destiny. Whilst sound enough, the advice is somewhat short, but both the writing and the illustrations that impart much of the setting's mood and feel offset this.

Yet the book is not quite perfect. Despite the decent index and that all of the information is there, finding particular facts can be difficult. It is also more of a gaming supplement than a sourcebook for the comic series, meaning that the gaming fan of the comic series is more likely to get the most out of ***The Red Star Campaign Setting***. Even so, the book successfully imparts a feel and sense of *The Red Star's* scale, grand, epic, and also nostalgic; as a Science Fiction setting, it looks to the past for its imagery and grandeur, that of the Soviet Union. While playing in the period of the U.S.S.R. might not be palatable to some, ***The Red Star Campaign Setting*** is perfect for those wanting some heavy magic with their Soviet chic.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Pyramid Review

Arkham Horror, Second Edition

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Richard Launius, Kevin Wilson, Shannon Appelcline, Greg Benage, & Christian T. Petersen

Edited by Greg Benage & Christian T. Petersen

Graphic design by Scott Nicely & Brian Schomburg

Rulebook, game board, first player marker, five six-sided dice, 16 investigator sheets, markers, and plastic stands, 196 status tokens, 189 investigator cards, eight Ancient One sheets, 20 doom tokens, 179 Ancient One cards, 60 monster markers, various other markers; full-color boxed set; \$49.95

Eighteen years isn't much for Great Cthulhu and his minions, given their millennia-long slumber, but for gamers it's a long time to be without *Arkham Horror*, Chaosium's now-collectible board game of eldritch horror. With help from Fantasy Flight Games, everybody's up and ready for breakfast.

The object is to prevent the Ancient One from waking or, barring that, defeat it in combat.

Up to eight players play investigators (or just six, depending on which half of the box you choose to believe), including solitaire play. Everyone has a customized ability, Stamina and Sanity scores, money, clues, equipment, spells, and so on. The heroes crisscross the infamous town of Arkham, divided into nine color-coded sections, each with two or three locations. Navigation is easy: Move to general areas on the streets, then hop off at the specific location to be explored. Decks tailored to that block tell you what happens. Sites may offer special effects, equipment, or a portal to hell.

Interdimensional gates open, spilling monsters into the hamlet. Investigators enter these gates, traverse bizarre realities on the other side, and return with the knowledge needed to seal the passageways. The same cards that split infinity also change playing conditions -- spells are easier, cultists become tougher opponents, and so on. On other worlds like the Plateau of Leng or the Dreamlands, different decks determine your fate. These tend toward skill rolls that giveth or taketh away spells or equipment. Sometimes you're lost in time and space, a strange, one-turn inconvenience that offers passage to anywhere on the board.

You fight monsters to reach gates. More gates means more monsters, which raises the terror level (how scary Arkham becomes each turn). If you close all the portals, or employ Elder Signs sufficient to stabilize the continuum, you've saved Arkham and won. Otherwise the Ancient One rises and you have to go toe-to-toe with it. Fail, and everyone loses as the dimensional floodgates open. Whoever closed the most gates becomes First Citizen and gets all the corndogs he can eat.

Some things to dislike: A simple pastime has become an overblown task. Twelve pages of rules became 24 (and four were subsumed into the card decks). You sort of get quick-start rules, but read everything or suffer the double-checks of the damned while making your share of errors. It's worlds away from the original . . . well, okay, we'll call them "rules" . . . but egad, the detail, and splitting it up doesn't help. That's plenty of fodder for new irritating questions ("*Must I roll or may I roll?*").

And wasn't there room in the budget for quick-reference cards? The cost has doubled . . . inflation, yes, and Fantasy Flight always fills the box with components commensurate with the price tag. *Buuut* . . . 22 decks (many with dainty cards you can barely get a grip on), nearly a dozen types of counters (including money -- why it eludes designers that some things are better tracked with pen and paper . . .), a board that's 22" by 33", and character cards the size of a paperback book. No wonder they have you "discard" to the bottom of the deck. Consider the table you use for games. Now imagine that's just big enough for the game components alone. Get an additional table. Order pizza and you might as well move to a new apartment.

The many deck names are only in the rules. Neither side of a card is labeled "Unique Item," for example. The location cards show pictures of the locales at which they're used, which is clever. But a learning curve for 30+ deck and counter names? Money is still of limited use, if at all. Entire games may pass without dipping into one's funds. Skill use means rolling dice equal to your current score, but most difficulties are at 1; if you have dice after modifiers (or have clue tokens to exchange for skills) you succeed. Monsters can be more formidable this way than Ancient Ones. The rules mention Luck is the most-used skill in encounters. Must be, because it's pretty scarce elsewhere. A (fortunately extraneous) victory chart figures your success "total" for a game, but without context; is "21" good, bad, pathetic? And inserting pawns into their crimped plastic stands is nearly impossible.

Some things to like: It's streamlined and still **Arkham Horror**. First you wonder how this can be the same game. Then the pieces come together, you see the changes, and you understand why they're for the better. Monster movement is much improved; Mythos cards call the gates, and any beings wandering town with matching symbols (square, cross, diamond) move along white and black directional arrows accordingly. Elder Signs are plentiful, and enough clue tokens can duplicate their effect.

Allies clear out of town (i.e., their deck) and businesses close as the terror level rises. You can alter skills -- this fails the reality-check, but you can strategically nudge stats higher when the need is anticipated. Circular counters indicate current skill totals, and though perhaps not the best method, they *actually work*. The decks may disappear with a sneeze, but these things stay put. You can win solo, and you needn't use (and track) three investigators like some editions we could mention. And Cthulhu and pals aren't random encounters . . . there are eight Ancient Ones, one per game, and each one's presence colors the entire game uniquely.

The artwork is, in a word, breathtaking. No one beats Fantasy Flight illustrations. Sadly, the color scheme on many pieces is surprisingly uniform in situ. Light falls into this game. Very moody, very atmospheric, very hard to find things once you've set them down on the playing field.

It's refreshing and fun, once you have the rhythm, and recalls the halcyon days . . . sometimes. New, high-priced editions aren't the problem per se, but with apologies to Dr. Malcolm, too many companies are asking "Can we afford to?" before "Do we need to?" **Arkham Horror** has gone from beer and pretzels to sherry and shad, but at least it's available again (reverse those statements if you like). You shan't pay eBay prices to play, but you will pay.

--Andy Vetromile

Origin-al Thoughts

On some level, I've never quite understood the purpose of convention reports. I mean, the convention in question is over, so it's not like a movie review where you can say, "Gee, that sounds good; let's go!" No; unless you routinely wear a multicolored scarf and carry a yo-yo, Origins 2005 is firmly inaccessible in the prison of the past.

Of course, maybe the purpose is to provide information so people can decide whether or not to go the next year, or -- for those who attended -- whether their experience matched up with mine. And, since it's my first Origins, I can't even compare them to previous Origins. (This Origins was, by far, the best Origins I've ever attended. It was also, without a doubt, the lousiest Origins I've ever been at.) Regardless, my reluctance of coming up with anything interesting about Origins is eclipsed by my reluctance of coming up with anything interesting to say about another topic altogether, so let's have at. (As a warning, these comments aren't in much order; feel free to attach a number to the front of each paragraph, roll some dice, and generate your own Random Thought Table!)

Keeping in mind that I've only been to one GenCon and one Origins, and both times I've been locked in the Dealer's Room, the following thought popped in my head early on, and it remained true throughout:

Origins is like GenCon without the excitement.

While this may sound harsh, this isn't meant as a criticism, per se. After all, GenCon's harried new release events, celebrity sightings, and nonstop events are exhausting; it's kind of nice to be at a con with a lot of the bustle of GenCon, only a lot more low key.

Of course, having been there to serve the corporate RPG masters of my Day Job, a con whose patrons 1) don't have as much of an interest in RPGs, and 2) haven't been whipped into a wallet-wielding frenzy isn't as profitable. (While waiting in line for badges, our boss overheard one person saying, "I didn't enter the dealer's hall *once* last year.")

Anyway, our travails to Columbus began when our decision to get a cargo van backfired horribly. The vehicle itself was fine (although not having cruise control was a killjoy), and it was nice being able to bring pretty much everything we could possibly imagine we could sell; however, the vehicle was roughly the size of Delaware, while the parking garages in downtown Columbus didn't have room for anything larger than two-thirds of a Mini-Cooper. As a result, our van ended up being parked in the outskirts of a stadium parking lot, approximately eleventy-jillion miles from the convention center, our hotel, and the Sun. Fortunately, Origins had a shuttle that traveled around to the major hotels (including ours), so the act of going to and fro was trivial, once we got settled.

We had a huge version of **JUNTA** planned, complete with oversized cards, an oversized board, funny hats, and bananas. Unfortunately, we were originally scheduled for the stage in the dealer's hall, but there wasn't a big enough table there, so our events were shuffled around to one of the tournament areas. It was difficult to let people know we were there, however, and this fact coupled with other oddities (such as one of the big games scheduled at the same time as a regular **JUNTA** game) means that only one of our four games actually happened. That one game ended when all four participants managed to assassinate each other at the same time.

On Friday there was an informal Origins Award gathering; they had free food, but no one knew this so we (along with the dozen or so other people there) ate beforehand. I actually got to give my acceptance speech for the *Pyramid* Origins, which was nice. The culmination of that evening, however, was when I mistakenly believed Bill McQuillan -- there from Wizards of the Coast to accept an award for ***Betrayal at House on the Hill*** -- to be Bill Slavicsek, and attempted to strike up a conversation. Embarrassment ensued, and I may feel uncomfortable for the next few years walking within 100 feet of the Wizards booth, lest I inadvertently tell Ed Stark how grateful I am that Iron Man protects us.

Speaking of chatting with other industry professionals, one of the nicest aspects of Origins is that, since things aren't as crazy as GenCon, creators are more accessible to chat with. As a result, I should hopefully have a number of interviews over the next month or so with some people and companies I found interesting. We'll see how it turns out.

The large booth/display area next to ours belonged to NCSoft, creators of ***Guild Wars***, ***Lineage II***, and ***City of Heroes***. Every two hours or so they would have a comic book trivia contest, where they would give out goodies to those who could answer a question fast enough. To make a long, ongoing story short, had I kept everything I'd won, I would have had a Collector's Edition of ***City of Heroes***, five copies of ***Lineage II*** (including a Collector's Edition), nine posters, and 10 T-shirts. As it was, I gave away everything I couldn't use to those who looked like they'd most appreciate it (usually younger kids who loved ***City of Heroes*** but weren't fast enough to win a shirt). However, I did keep a set of shirts, two of the posters, and the copy of ***City of Heroes***. The latter I'll probably offer my thoughts on as soon as I have the free time to play it, which will probably be in 2017. (Disappointingly, I did *not* win a copy of ***Guild Wars***, the one thing I really wanted to win behind the ***City of Heroes*** game. Oh, well . . . maybe they'll be at GenCon.)

Beyond that, it seemed like a fun con for all those who attended, and a general informal poll of those who stopped by the booth indicated that everyone ranged from "generally content" to "ecstatic." For my money, I still think I'd choose GenCon over Origins, but my interests in going to these shows is different from people . . . and I still have a hard time envisioning why I'd want to go to a convention to play a game that I could play at home with friends. Regardless, these are the kinds of problems you want to have: deciding between two cons where you're pretty much going to have a good time at either.

* * *

On more somber notes, my heart goes out to all those in London, especially those whose loved ones have been killed or injured. As strong as the bonds are between the United States and the United Kingdom, so too are my feelings and support for you all. May the world come together to realize that indiscriminately killing the innocent is always evil, and the only effect is to strengthen the resolve of the attacked and their allies. If there is anything I can do to help any of our London readers or friends, let me know.

* * *

And on a more personal note, my thoughts and prayers also go out to Scott Haring and his family. There are no words that can compare to the pain of a child's loss. May we all treasure every moment with our family and loved ones, because such moments are always finite.

--Steven Marsh

Pulling your Weight

Ropes and Cordage

by S.E. Mortimer

This work attempts to explore the history of rope making, outlines various techniques that have been used, and compiles various types of rope into a basic list that might be useful in a roleplaying campaign. It also includes some expanded rules and game mechanics. Page references are for **GURPS Fourth edition** and the Tech Level definitions are also from *Fourth Edition* (page 27).

Introduction

Rope and cordage is an adventuring essential, every character would be wise to carry several types. It is used for climbing; holding luggage on a pack animal; securing a captured prisoner; making a snare; stringing a bow; weaving a net; as an impromptu garrotte; even to hold up your pants and lace shoes to your feet.

Rope Material

Historically, reeds, rushes, roots, straw, animal hair, and strips of hide have all been used to make rope. The earliest types were probably made from vines or ivy twisted into a length of primitive rope. The most common types of rope were made from plant fibers. There are three main categories of fiber based on the where they are found on the plant. The strongest fibers have the highest percentage of cellulose.

"Bast" or soft fibers: Phloem fibers in the inner bark of dicot stems (flax, hemp, jute, nettle, ramie). They are extracted from stems by "retting," which is controlled rotting using microbial agents to degrade the soft tissue leaving only the tough fibers, which are then separated from the rest of the stem (called "scutching").

Leaf or hard fibers: Fibrovascular bundles or leaf veins (sisal, yucca, palm, manila). They are extracted by "decortication," where unwanted tissues are manually scraped away.

Surface fibers: Found covering some seeds, leaves, and fruit (cotton, coir, milkweed). They are extracted through a process called "ginning" in which the fibers are torn loose from the plant material.

Once extracted, the fibers are cleaned to remove contaminants, and combed so that they lay parallel to one another, ready to be spun into yarn.

Making Yarn

Most rope starts out as thin fibers. These fibers need to be spun into a thicker strand called thread or yarn. The skill of creating yarn dates back to the Palaeolithic era. Once the yarn has been created, many items can be made including nets, textiles, and rope.

Definitions

Some terminology needs to be defined in order to prevent confusion. This article will use the following definitions:

Fiber: Elongated thick-walled cells which die at maturity and function as support tissue. Animal fibers are composed mainly of protein (keratin). Plant fibers are mainly cellulose but also may contain lignin, tannins, pectins, etc.

Yarn: Bundles of fibers that have been spun into thread.

Strand: Bundles of yarn that have been twisted into string (called "twining").

Cord: Made by twisting or braiding multiple strands together. Any rope that is less than one inch thick is classed as cord.

Rope: The same as a cord except that it is one inch thick or heavier.

Hand Twisting (TL0): Twisted yarn is made by holding the fibers in one hand while the other hand pinches off a portion of fiber. The fibers are then twisted between the fingers while simultaneously being pulled out to create longer lengths of yarn. Another method is to roll the fibers along the thigh. Hand twisting is very time consuming.

Stick Twisting (TL0): A hooked stick can be used to speed up the thigh-twisting process. A "leader thread" is created by hand twisting and then wrapped around the stick. The stick is then rolled horizontally along the length of the thigh with one hand, while the other hand plays out more fibers.

Drop Spinning (TL0): The first drop spinning tool was probably the campside rock. A leader thread would be hand twisted and then tied around the rock. This rock could then be rotated and dropped to spin the fibers as they are played out through the fingers. Rock spinning is still done today by some nomadic Asian tribes.

Hand Spindle (TL0): This was first developed in the Neolithic era and combines the concepts of both stick twisting and rock spinning. A *whorl*, often made of clay, bone, or soft stone, was attached to a stick to create a spindle. The spindle could be twisted by hand with the weighted end of the shaft suspended on the ground, or rolled along the thigh as described above. It could also be used as a "drop spindle." Before being dropped, a leader thread is wrapped around it or tied to a hook on top and, as it spins, more fibers are played out to be spun by the spindle. When the spindle touches the ground, the thread is rewound and the spinning process is repeated. The lighter the whorl, the faster it spins and the tighter the yarn is twisted. Extremely fine thread can be made in this manner. For example, the delicate threads for the famed Indian Dacca muslin were spun using needle-thin pieces of bamboo in a coconut shell. Sometimes the fibers are played out from a *distaff* held in the other hand, or tucked under the arm. The distaff is a stick with a fork or paddle-like comb used to hold fibers waiting for the spindle. A spindle costs \$5 and weighs 1 lb. A distaff costs \$5 and weighs 2 lbs. (LT29)

Spinning Wheel (TL3): Possibly invented as early as the 8th century in India (called a *charkha*) and it gradually spread throughout Asia. The Chinese added a treadle to improve its efficiency. By the Middle Ages it was prevalent in Europe, but the European spinning wheels were turned by means of a handle, not a treadle, until the 17th century. The spinning wheel consisted of a spindle set in a frame that was rotated by means of a drive belt passing over a wheel. It was rotated by using a pulley to turn the spindle, which spun the yarn. To wind the spun yarn onto a bobbin, the wheel was stopped and rotated in the opposite direction. A Spinning Wheel costs \$100 and weighs 40 lbs. (LT103).

Flyer Wheel (TL4): Sometimes called a "flax wheel" or "Saxony wheel." It incorporated a more complex mechanism operated by a treadle. It performed the spinning process and bobbin winding in a single, continuous operation -- it was particularly suited for flax, wool, and cotton. A Flyer Wheel costs \$300 and weighs 50 lbs.

The Rope Maker

Women could spin the yarn, but men made the rope. Almost every village had a resident rope maker ("roper"). The roper's craft was ancient and his equipment simple. Rope making was often conducted out in the open but sometimes long, low-roofed buildings were used. It couldn't be conducted in the rain because the fibers shouldn't get wet during the process. The skill involves twisting yarns together (called "twining") in one direction to make thicker strands, and then twisting the strands together in the opposite direction to make rope. This direction switching creates a rope that doesn't kink and lays nice and easy. Some skill is needed to get the right amount of twist and tension. Creating a separate skill for rope making is probably unnecessary. This skill could be subsumed into the Knot-Tying skill (p.B203) with familiarity penalties applied to unfamiliar tools and techniques. A skill roll should be made for each length of rope. The degree of success determines how quickly the rope is made. If the skill roll is made exactly, the rope is completed in the time listed. Each point above or below this amount modifies the manufacture time by +/- 5%. A critical failure results in a hidden flaw in the rope that will become apparent on an occasion that the GM thinks is dramatically appropriate. A critical success increases the maximum load of the rope by 20%.

Hand Twisting (TL0): Very light two-ply cords can be made by "thigh rolling." Two bundles of fibers are rolled as separate strands across the thigh. Then they are rolled backwards together over each other to create the cord. To

Braiding

lengthen the cord, fresh bundles were overlapped over the existing bundles before they had been completely twisted and then rolled on the thigh to join them together. A skilled cord maker would take about an hour to hand-twist one yard of two-ply cord -- maximum thickness of around 1/8".

Thicker three-ply cord required a different process. Three bundles of fibers are tied together at one end and held firmly in the left hand. The right hand takes one of the bundles and twists them to the left while simultaneously wrapping them around the other two strands to the right. The left thumb holds this in place while the same operation is carried out on the second bundle. The left thumb holds the two completed strands in place while the third is twisted and wrapped. The process is repeated, introducing additional fibers into the operation as the original ones are used up. These cords are relatively light -- a thickness of 3/8" would be about the maximum. A skilled cord maker would take around two hours to make one yard of three-ply cord.

The Rope Walk (TL1): Light lengths of cord can be made by hand but heavier ropes require some sort of machine. A simple "rope walk" consisted of a "twining machine" at one end with three to five rotating hooks. This was anchored firmly to the ground. At the other end was a "sledge" with a single hook. Bundles of yarn were tied to each twining hook (usually only three hooks were used) and all of these were run along to the single hook on the sledge. The initial distance between the two devices could be over 300 yards. Rope is made in two steps. The first step involved turning the hooks on the twining machine, spinning the yarn into thicker strands. As the hooks twist, the length of the strands shorten, pulling the sledge closer. Twining is continued until the strands are twisted as tightly as possible without kinking. The second step involves twisting the strands into rope. This is done by means of a grooved wedge or cone-shaped bobbin called a "top." While the strands are being twined, the top is inserted between the strands, near the sledge, to keep them separated. The roper usually does this while his assistant turns the twining hooks. Once the strands are twined, the top is slowly slid forward along the strands away from the sledge. The energy stored in the twined strands causes the hook on the sledge to rotate in the opposite direction. This process is called "laying" the rope. As the strands wrap around each other, the rope is created. When complete, the ends of the rope are "whipped" off with crown-and-back-splices to keep them from unraveling. The final length is about 25% shorter than the initial distance of the rope walk. For example, if the rope walk was initially 300 yards long, the final length of the rope would be around 225 yards. It takes about eight hours to make a 10-yard length of rope using this method, but multiply this figure by the thickness of the rope in inches. For example, a 3/4" rope would take $8 \times 3/4 = 6$ hours.

Rope "Jacks" (TL2+): More complex rope-making devices (sometimes called "jacks") include pulleys, straps, and gears. There are hundreds of variations, but the basic principal is the same -- make strands by twisting yarn in one direction and make the rope by wrapping the strands together in the opposite direction. The main advantage of these devices is to decrease the time required to make the rope. It takes seven hours to make a 1" thick, 10-yard length of rope with a TL2 device. For every advance in TL, reduce the time required by one hour. So a TL5 device would make a 10-yard length in four hours.

Reciprocal Gearing (TL6): This is a more advanced rope making machine that twined strands and laid rope all in one operation. This is accomplished by means of reciprocal gearing. Bundles of yarn are attached to the twining hooks as described above. As the hand crank is turned, the yarn is twined into strands in one direction, and these are wrapped together in the opposite direction to make rope. Leonardo Da Vinci was the first to conceive of such a device but it wasn't developed until several centuries later. It takes about 3 hours to make a 1" thick, 10-yard length of rope.

Another method to make rope is by braiding or plaiting. In the past this was usually only done with flat materials such as straw or strips of hide, but today many ropes are braided. Braiding has some advantages. Twisted, or "laid" rope is easy to knot or splice and is very elastic, but can be "knobbly," and is rough on the hands. Braided rope is less elastic, and is smoother, so it plays through the hands easier. It is also a little stronger, and resists abrasion better. Until recently, braided rope was laboriously produced only in short lengths by hand but today it can be manufactured by automated machines. If a rope is braided instead of laid, increase max load by +10% and increase the cost and manufacture time by +50%.

Dynamic Loads & Climbing

The maximum weights suggested for various types of rope are for *stationary* loads -- hauling cargo, suspension

Types of Rope

Rope was normally measured in cubits -- "short" cubits, not "regular" cubits. A regular cubit is measured from the elbow to the tips of the fingers (around 1.5 feet). A short cubit is measured from the elbow to the palm (around one foot), which happens to be the length of each loop when a rope is coiled around palm and elbow. (There is also a "long" cubit, which is an additional handbreadth longer again).

Ropes need different properties depending on their application. A rope in a suspension bridge, for example, is under a constant load and so needs to have more creep resistance than a climbing rope, but it doesn't need the elasticity and flexibility of a climbing rope. An adventurer is probably going to need a good climbing rope more than any other type. The best adventuring rope will not be too heavy, have a high tensile strength, be flexible and elastic, have high impact toughness, be resistant to abrasion, and able to withstand moisture and temperature extremes. Rope made from natural fibers is strong, but prone to abrasion and other hazards including mildew, rot, insects and vermin. It can swell when wet, and in icy conditions it can break. Synthetic fibers have been developed to help address some of these problems (see "Synthetic Materials," below). Modern climbing ropes combine a synthetic fiber core with a protective textile sheath. Note that the maximum loads listed for ropes are only for stationary loads. For dynamic loads the limit is *halved* (see "Dynamic Loads & Climbing" textbox, right).

All the ropes described below are of a uniform thickness -- one inch. As mentioned in **Low-Tech**, for thicker or thinner ropes, multiply weight, cost, and strength by the square of the diameter in inches. For example, if a 1" thick rope weighs 9 lbs and can hold 2,000 lbs. A 3/8" rope of the same material weighs 1.26 lbs and can support 253 lbs. The thickest rope a man can grasp and pull is 2.5 inches (p.LT31).

Natural Materials

Grass (TL0): A quick, temporary rope can be made by braiding stems and leaves of grass or thin reeds together. According to **Low-Tech** (p.LT31), a green grass rope has about one-fifth the strength of rope made from tough plant fibers. A 1" thick, 10-yard length weighs 9 lbs, costs \$3, and can safely hold about 360 lbs.

Vines/Ivy (TL0): A thick supple vine or several thinner ones twisted together can make a serviceable rope. According to **Low-Tech** (p.LT31) a rope made from this material can support about half the weight of a rope made from plant fibers. A 1" thick, 10-yard length weighs 9 lbs, costs \$10, and can safely hold about 900 lbs.

Plant Fibers (TL0): This rope is made using the techniques described above, from one of the tough plant fibers previously mentioned including flax, papyrus, jute, yucca, etc. A 1" thick, 10-yard length weighs 9 lbs, costs \$20, and can safely hold about 1,800 lbs. Some plant fibers, such as hemp and manila, are stronger than others. Manila is preferred today because it is more resistant to water and salt than hemp. If the GM wishes a superior type of rope, a 10-yard length made of hemp or manila might cost \$30 and hold 2,000 lbs.

Animal Hair (TL0): Primarily consists of a protein called "keratin" rather than

bridges, etc. For instances in which the rope undergoes *dynamic* loads and sudden shock, such as towing and climbing, only *half* the maximum load can be supported. So if a rope with a maximum load of 500 lbs is used for climbing, it will only support a weight of 250 lbs.

Breaking Strain

There is a safety factor built into the maximum loads, so it is possible to exceed the limit without the rope breaking. Many factors determine exactly when a rope might break including amount of movement, moisture, temperature, condition of the rope, etc. A simple way to model this is with percentile dice. For every 1% above the load limit, the chance of breaking increases by +1%.

For example, a rope with a load limit of 2,000 lbs is loaded with 2,500 lbs. This is 500 lbs or 25% above the limit, so the rope will break on a percentile roll of 25 or less. This rope will *automatically* break if loaded with 4,000 lbs (double the load limit).

Basic Set Entries

On page 288 of the *Basic Set*, there are two entries for rope: one is 3/8" and the other is 3/4". Assuming that they are made of manila (in "Plant

cellulose. It is difficult to collect enough hair to make a rope of significant length. The Romans seem to have preferred goat hair. Human hair is useful because it can be grown longer than many other mammals and so less individual fibers are needed to make a length of yarn. Horse hair is also useful because of its length. Treat a rope made of animal hair the same as one made from plant fibers.

Braided Hide (TL0): Made by braiding or plaiting several strips of leather or rawhide together. The Vikings and Inuit made rope from walrus or sealskin. Caribou sinew was also used. In North America, buffalo hide was preferred. In Africa, it was rhinoceros hide. Treat the same as rope made from plant fibers except that it can only be made in fairly short lengths. These need to be spliced together to make long lengths of rope. Hide rope is also very susceptible to water. When wet it will swell, stretch and sometimes break. Wet hide can only handle *half* its normal load limit.

Silk (TL1): Produced from cocoons of the mulberry silk moth pupae (*bombyx mori*), i.e. silkworms. Its use dates back to the Shang Dynasty in China (2nd millennium BC). Silk is very strong, but every time it is processed it loses some of that strength, so raw silk is best for rope. Silk is very susceptible to UV radiation and abrasion and deteriorates quickly, losing 10% of its strength each year (see "Deterioration" textbox, below). A 1" thick, 10-yard length of rope made of silk fibers might weigh 5 lbs, costs \$100, and safely holds about 5,000 lbs.

Spidersilk (TL9): It is not yet possible to harvest spider silk in large enough quantities to make useful lengths of rope. Spidersilk is around five times stronger than steel. A 1" thick, 10-yard length of rope made of spidersilk fibers might weigh 5 lbs, cost \$10,000, and safely hold about 100,000 lbs.

Synthetic Materials

Nylon (TL7): Developed in the 1930s, nylon is around twice as strong as hemp or manila and weighs less. Nylon does not lose much strength from being wet and can withstand sudden shock, making it very good for dynamic loading. Its disadvantage is that it is susceptible to UV radiation and heat -- too much friction can cause it to soften and melt. A 1" thick, 10-yard length of Nylon weighs 7.5 lbs, costs \$20, and can safely hold about 4,000 lbs.

Polyester (TL7): Also called Dacron, polyester is similar to Nylon except that it has low elasticity. This makes it good for static loads but not so good for dynamic loads. It is also better at resisting abrasion and UV radiation. A 1" thick, 10-yard length of Polyester weighs 7.5 lbs, costs \$20, and can safely hold about 4,000 lbs.

Polypropylene (TL7): This is another synthetic similar to Nylon except that it is less dense than water, so it floats. It also doesn't absorb water. For these reasons it is commonly used in the boating industry. Polypropylene ("Poly") is very susceptible to UV radiation and has a very low melting point, so it deteriorates quickly, losing 10% of its strength each year (see "Deterioration" textbox, right). A 1" thick, 10-yard length of Poly in good condition weighs 6 lbs, costs \$15, and can safely hold about 3,500 lbs.

Aramid (TL7): Also known as Kevlar, Twaron, and Technora. Aramid fibers have about twice the strength of nylon but very low elasticity and light weight.

Fibers" -- left -- we listed a 1" manila rope as: cost \$30; weight 9 lbs; load 2,000 lbs). Adjusting for thickness, we get the following:

For a 3/8" manila rope, multiply the cost, weight and load by $3/8^2$: Cost \$4.20; weight 1.3 lbs; load 281 lbs.

For a 3/4" manila rope, multiply the cost, weight and load by $3/4^2$: Cost \$17; weight 5 lbs; load 1,125 lbs.

These numbers are close but not exactly the same as those suggested on page 288. Rounding may account for the differences.

Deterioration

All fibers deteriorate over time. Some are susceptible to moisture, mildew, and rotting. Others are susceptible to sunlight and UV radiation. Most don't like temperature extremes. Frequent use can see abrasion and impact reducing the strength of the rope even further. As a general rule, any rope that is regularly used will lose about 10% of its strength each year. So a rope that could hold 2,000 lbs when new will only be able to hold 1,600 lbs after two years. Severe conditions, such as excessive moisture, might double the rate of deterioration.

It is very susceptible to UV radiation and loses strength when knotted (or even simply bent) because of internal abrasion. Aramid rope deteriorates quickly, losing 10% of its strength each year (see "Deterioration" textbox, right). A 1" thick, 10-yard length of Aramid in good condition weighs 5 lbs, costs \$50, and can safely hold about 8,000 lbs.

HMDPE (TL8): Also known as Spectra and Dyneema. HMDPE stands for "High Molecular Density Polyethylene." An excellent material for rope and is light enough to float on water. It doesn't absorb water and is UV resistant. It is susceptible to gradual creep, however, so isn't suitable for some static loads. A 1" thick, 10-yard length weighs 5 lbs, costs \$100, and can safely hold about 10,000 lbs.

Vectran (TL8): A naphthalene-based thermotropic liquid crystal polymer. Vectran is considered the ultimate rope material. It is very strong, has little elasticity and no propensity to creep. It floats on water and has excellent resistance to abrasion. However, like Aramid, it is susceptible to UV radiation, so it is almost always manufactured with a protective sheath. A 1" thick, 10-yard length weighs 5 lbs, costs \$500, and can safely hold about 13,000 lbs.

Advanced Fibers (TL8): Materials such as *Zylon* and *M5* are very light fibers currently undergoing testing for anti-ballistic body armor. It is likely that these "next generation" fibers will produce rope that has a similar weight to Vectran but are capable of holding even greater loads. M5 is particularly useful since it is very resistant to UV radiation and high temperatures -- including flame. A 1" thick, 10-yard length might weigh 4 lbs, cost \$5,000, and can safely hold about 20,000 lbs.

Nanotubes (TL9): Nanotubes were discovered in 1991 by electron microscopist Sumio Iijima at NEC in Japan. A nanotube can be thought of as a sheet consisting of benzene rings -- a "hex-grid" of carbon atoms. This sheet is rolled to make a seamless cylinder -- similar in appearance to rolled-up chicken wire with hemispherical caps on each end. It is currently possible to spin nanotube fibers into "nanoyarn," but lengths are not yet sufficient enough to produce rope (or even twine). In time, it is conceivable that rope will be made from nanotubes. Rope made from multiple strands of nanoyarn will have less strength than a single solid mass of long nanotubes. A 1" thick, 10-yard length might weigh 4 lbs, cost \$50,000, and can safely hold about 200,000 lbs.

Synthetic fibers like Nylon deteriorate more slowly. They lose 2% of their strength every year. Modern braided ropes that are covered with some sort of protective sheath (e.g. "paracord") lose 1% of their strength every three years.

The Idden

by David Morgan-Mar

Nobody knows where they come from. Few even know they exist. But they're there. Hidden in the corners of our consciousness, lurking between the frames of our persistence-of-vision, the flickering motion glimpsed in a mirror that isn't there when you turn around.

The idden are human-sized insectoid beings occupying a phase of reality that intersects only weakly with our own. Humans cannot normally see them directly or feel their presence. The best a person can do is catch a glance of vague movement out of the corner of an eye.

The Focus

Idden need a material focus if they are to interact with our reality. A focus is usually a small object, common and of no intrinsic interest. Typical examples include a coin, a seashell, or a pencil. Each individual idden is bound to one focus. Although they can transfer to another focus, the effort involved is great and they do so only when necessary, such as when a focus is destroyed or lost forever to humanity.

An idden focus is also bound -- more loosely -- to an individual human. The human will consider the focus to be his "lucky coin" or "favorite seashell," or it might simply be the pencil he habitually uses at work. The owner of the focus is not compelled to carry it everywhere, but will keep it somewhere where it can normally be accessed at least once a week - the seashell could be left in a collection at home or the pencil left on his desk at work. The owner can also take extended trips away from the focus, so long as the intention is to return. A permanent move, however, activates a strong compulsion to take the focus to a new home.

Through these two links, an idden is associated with one particular human. In many ways, an idden's human is more important to it than its focus is. This is because the idden *feeds* off its human.

Feeding

Idden are blood eaters. They normally feed daily, but can go several months without blood if need be. They are not deliberately subtle about feeding: they open long but shallow scratch wounds in their victim's skin and lick the congealing blood up as it wells to the surface. The effect is similar to a severe cat scratch.

What makes the idden's feeding method particularly insidious is their existence in a disjoint phase of reality. Although the human victim is physically wounded and bleeding, he does not normally feel the scratches or see the blood. Neither do human observers. To all conventional examination methods, the victim is unwounded and in perfectly good health. His hemoglobin levels may be a little low, but that's not uncommon and a few iron tablets will prop that right back up again.

As the feeding continues over weeks, months, and into years, the human victim will become covered with unsightly scratch marks and scars -- but only to those whose vision penetrates the idden's reality. Normal observers, including the victim himself, continue to see nothing unusual. There may be a slow loss of health and vitality, but again, that is not uncommon and some do people seem to age faster than others.

Because an idden is physically bound to its focus, feeding can only take place when the human is near the focus. But since the idden is normally undetectable, this is not a huge limitation, and one can normally feed in comfort and safety for several hours a day.

Glimpses

Despite the weak interaction between our reality and the idden's, there are times when people can catch glimpses of what is really happening. When people are tired and their minds are not alert, their consciousness can slip more easily into the idden's realm. This is when momentary glimpses of the idden can be caught.

Humans normally cannot see the idden directly. They can only be seen fleetingly in peripheral vision. As soon as someone turns to look directly at the strange movement in the corner of his eye, he sees nothing but his own reality. A human's idden can be standing directly in front of him (and frequently is) without being seen, heard, or felt. People can also steal glances at idden wounds in this way. A momentary glimpse of oneself in a swinging mirror, or of another person, can reveal a flash of horrible scratch marks that vanish when the person looks directly and closely.

Sleepers can also sometimes see the idden in their dreams. The dreamworld reality is much closer to the idden's than our waking world is. People who don't understand call such dreams nightmares.

Other people -- those with a loose grasp on reality -- can more easily see the idden and their effects on people. We call these people mentally ill, as they describe hideous events which clearly aren't true, and give them psychotic drugs or lock them away for their own good.

Fighting the Idden

The major obstacles to fighting against the idden are learning of their existence and methods, and developing a way to detect them unambiguously.

Psychically sensitive individuals may have better luck at deliberately catching glimpses of the idden with their peripheral vision than a non- sensitive. Some forms of ritual magic might force the idden into "phasing" into a space where they can be detected normally, or perhaps some mystical herbs or smoke can do the job. If religious authorities learn anything about the idden, they may decide that they are demons and believe prayer is an effective tool. In some universes, technology might have an answer.

Once detected, the best way to rid a person of an idden is to determine what the focus is and remove or destroy it. Without an effective method of figuring out what the focus is, however, this could be a long game of trial and error. Even if the focus is discovered, the battle is only half over . . .

No matter what the victim is told (or shown), he is incapable of seeing the focus as a threat and will not allow it to be taken away. Furthermore, the victim is endowed with an unnatural cunning in maintaining possession of the focus. As soon as he (or his idden) becomes aware that people are seeking the focus, he will "accidentally lose" it or sequester it in a place where it cannot be found. No amount of persuasion will get the victim to admit to knowing where the focus is.

If the focus is removed, the victim will go to great lengths to retrieve it. Initially this will be simple requests ("Can I please have my pencil back?"), but if thwarted the victim will escalate to criminal acts. Physical violence will be the last resort -- the victim will prefer stealth and robbery over assault. The compulsion to retrieve the focus gradually fades over several months; perhaps a year later the victim could be considered cured. Except he will keep the feeding scars for life.

Refocusing

If an idden's focus is destroyed or removed from all contact with humans, the idden will fade away, becoming a shadow of its former self. In this form it can move at will, until it finds a new object to use as a focus. This needs to be an object already habitually kept by a person. Any such object can harbor a wandering idden, and over a period of a few months it will attach itself to the new focus. Once attached, it can begin feeding once more.

An idden with a focus and a human can change focus in this way if it chooses to, but normally won't because it involves a long period of enforced starvation while it binds to the new focus.

What are the Idden?

There are several possibilities:

Animals -- The idden are simply beings with an imperative to feed and reproduce. They may possess a raw cunning to avoid detection and deal with threats, but apart from their otherworldly presence they are nothing special.

Spirits -- The idden are clearly not of this world. So what world are they from? There may be many different creatures who share their phase of reality -- a spirit world of some sort. The idden may be only one manifestation of a group of beings that appear in human legends variously as faerie or spirits.

Aliens -- The idden are intelligent, and use their command of space and time to launch this insidious attack on humanity. Perhaps physical travel through space is too hard, so they developed a method of traveling in between the gaps of the quanta which make up our universe.

Our Subconscious -- The idden are us. The strong attachment to particular individuals points to the idden being a manifestation of our own repressed desires and fears. People with low self-esteem or chronic depression are likely victims. The idden cause the damage that these people cannot bear to inflict on themselves. Others lash out antisocially, using their idden to harm others while maintaining a facade of innocence.

Adventure Seeds

- One of the heroes starts having strange nightmares. He keeps seeing his face and arms scratched and bleeding, and wakes in a cold sweat to find himself perfectly well. The lack of sleep starts to interfere with his job, and he begins to see odd things out of the corner of his eyes. It may be time for a psychological assessment, a psychic reading, or a trip to the local witch for help. For an alternative, several of the PCs could become afflicted with similar symptoms more or less simultaneously.
- Worried parents bring a child in for a psychological assessment. The boy keeps telling wild stories about giant bugs attacking his mother, father, and older sister. He says they are always bleeding and the things are licking up the blood. Who will believe him, and if anyone does, what will they do about it?
- A group of ghost busters are hired by an edgy socialite who swears she has been seeing "ghosts" in mirrors at her country mansion. With their professional parapsychological detection gear, the heroes may have a better chance than most of figuring out what is happening. For extra spice, the socialite has also called in a local psychic (fraud or real) and her Catholic priest for advice and help.
- A new science experiment promises to reveal new dimensions and alternate worlds! People might soon travel between dimensions, opening up vast realms of adventure. The first step is developing equipment to allow us to see into these new dimensions, so we know where we're going. When the "dimension goggles" are switched on, the first user starts raving about monsters. Swift investigation reveals these grotesque insectoid beings are everywhere . . . feeding on humanity without our knowledge. The government steps in to hush up the news, and initiates a top secret project to fight the weird menace.
- A man has been apprehended breaking and entering into the house of a workmate. He was caught leaving, with nothing more than a pencil taken. It turned out to be a pencil the workmate had accidentally picked up off his desk and forgot to replace. Why did the suspect commit a crime over a pencil? Scientists and psychologists are called in to investigate.
- A series of strange murders is occurring. Victims are usually elderly, and are found covered with cuts and scar tissue indicating long-term torture. This is despite reports from relatives that the victims were in good health just the week before. Something weird is going on, and the police could use help from experts. There may be similar cases all over the country, dating back hundreds of years, if one digs deeply enough into the records.

Pyramid Review

One of the Living (for All Flesh Must Be Eaten)

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Written by Ben Monroe with David Ackerman-Gray, Brian Isikoff, & Angelo DiStephano plus Evin Ager, Rachel Collett, Bastien Pillon, Daniel R. Davis, J. Carpio Dregg, James Wilbur, & Ross A. Isaacs

Cover by Karl Coston Christiansen

Interior Illustrations by Travis Ingram, Chris Keefe, & Dan Oropallo

160-page 7½ by 9½-inch perfect bound softback; \$24.00

Although considered a fine game, [All Flesh Must Be Eaten](#) has its detractors. They suggest that the game is only suitable for one-off adventures, survival being an objective enough, and it concentrates a little too much on details of the corpse cortege to the detriment of those still alive. And they have a point, which is where the game's latest supplement steps in. While the various supplements, from [Fistful o' Zombies](#) to [Zombie Smackdown](#) ask where you were when it happened, **One Of The Living** asks, "What did you do next?" This supplement extends the "life" of the Deadworld, specifically modern set American ones beyond the nature of the disaster itself.

This extension starts with new character options, including randomly rolling attributes or buying everything -- attributes, skills, qualities, drawbacks, and metaphysics -- from one pool of points. New skills like agriculture, repair and scavenging all lend themselves to long-term games. As do qualities and drawbacks like Black or Green Thumb, Insomnia, Jury Rigging, or Threat Detection. Games with a supernatural element can be made easier by reducing both miracle and essence costs. These options are accompanied by several new miracles. More fun are the new combat options, especially those for enhanced gun realism that allow for the fact firearms are loud, hot, and that recoil is bad, and difficult to handle for the inexperienced.

It takes a technical turn when considering our survival needs. In the post-post apocalyptic world, the scavenging skill becomes a story generator all by itself, as does the ability to jury rig. In turn efforts necessary to keep various aspects of our advanced society going are scrutinized. Power from muscle and alcohol to coal, wood and more ecologically sound means are detailed, as are the requirements for clean water, food growth and storage, light, radio and transportation. The fundamentals of both firearms and explosives are considered in more depth and backed up by several new weapons, including home made explosives, nail and potato guns, and defensive items like bear traps, caltrops, highway spike systems, and AP and claymore mines. Vehicles include the airboat, black helicopter, skateboard, snowmobile, and ultra-lite plane, in addition to the example makeshift vehicles, an APC and a junk buggy. The new gear concentrates on survival needs, from the automatic tourniquet to three grades of toiletry kit, followed by several new artifacts.

One Of The Living gives us a new look at the zombie. It needs to, since the book extends the campaign, it also has to extend the un-lifespan of the zombie. No longer is the zombie just something to run screaming from or blow away. Now a zombie gets to bloat, decay, and skeletize. The four stages are described in no little detail with zombie attributes suffering accordingly. And as to that old cadaver crew crawl, once past rigor mortis, a zombie no longer suffers from the protein lock that renders his movement stilted and difficult. As the Zombie Master, watch with hilarity the look on the players' faces when the formerly decrepit dead suddenly spring forth with a spryness belying their

deceased status. Zombies also get a few new aspects for the ZM that likes to design his own.

More un-life means a longer game, a campaign rather than a one-off. The discussion on the campaign against the one-off is standard enough that becomes more in applying the psychological theory of a "hierarchy of needs" to what we need to survive. There are five in the hierarchy: psychological needs, safety, love, affection or belonging, esteem and self-actualization, each of which needs to be fulfilled before the next can be considered. In terms of *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, only the first two come into play in most games, but in *One Of The Living*, the latter three play a more important role. To help with these last three, the UniSystem gets rules for madness, which has a cast member acquiring madness points, gain enough and he is rewarded with disadvantages starting with nightmares, before going on to addiction, phobias, and worse. Though not a long piece, it makes for interesting and sobering reading and is just as applicable to other post-apocalyptic games.

The book's ideas are put into practice with a fully fleshed out setting, "Sunset Falls." This describes the survivors of the town Oaktown, who have holed up in the local jail, Cranston Prison. Led by a retired corrections officer, the newly forged community reads like a cross section of American society, as put together by TV screenwriters. Comprised of four factions, it centers on the community's leaders, a group of engineering students, a small time hip-hop singer, and a recently arrived preacher. All four have goals concerning aggressive stance, luxury, security, and survival, and varying degrees of clout to carry them out. These goals and the relationships between the factions both work as driving factors for storytelling. All the ZM has to do is throw the player characters into the mix, or raid its ideas for a self-designed post-risen community.

Being an *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* supplement, you of course, get Deadworlds . . . six of them this time. The first is Bastien Pilon's "Croatoan Rising," which with supernatural elements allows the inclusion of Inspired characters. Ten years ago, half of the world's population suddenly vanished, which when combined with zombie army attacks by, tipped civilization into chaos and back untold decades. They are still out there, as are other Lovecraftian horrors. "Digging Our Own Grave" by Evin Ager, appears inspired by the SARS outbreak, a disease spreading from China causing the dead to rise, though it is not contemporary enough to use the proper name for Bombay. The drastic method of using nuclear strikes to incinerate the outbreaks only escalated and now humanity resides in cramped, near idyllic cities of the future surrounded by heavy walls and defenses. Advanced Zombie Military Squads armed with a compressed laser rifles suppress outbreaks of "Acute Reanimation Syndrome" with extreme prejudice. Rachel Collet's "On The Ground Floor" is set even longer after the event, when the dead woke up and began feasting. The Sky People have found refuge in the higher floors of New York's skyscrapers, denying the undead access by blocking stairwells and lift shafts. Of course, this makes scavenging difficult, and there is great status in being a successful scavenger.

J. Carpio Dregg's "Necropolis!" is a *Pulp Zombies!* Deadworld that finds San Francisco cut off from the rest of the world in 1928. Rameses V has raised an undead army to enforce his will and drive the population to build a pyramid for the new Dark Pharaoh. Only two areas hold out against the might of the horde, with gangsters best equipped to provide protection to both. Another option is to have a band of extraordinary heroes arise to save the city. Of the six, this is the most standard Deadworld. In James Wilbur's "Make Space" it was a passing comet's irradiating effect that caused the dead to rise. Now giving service to society earns citizenship and a place in the protected safe zones. The recovering nations are only now taking an interest in the orbital habitats that were lost to radiation. "Silver" by Daniel R Davis is a twist upon *The Terminator* future, in which the advanced nano technology not only repairs and heals the injured; it also kept the dead going. Advanced nano-zombies or Mechanites are capable of teamwork and the nano-virus not only gives them bionic enhancements, it breaks down other technological devices. This makes modern technology scarce, as it is often infected, the result being that the most advanced available are muskets and ploughshares.

The supplement is rounded out with two appendices. The first is a guide to surviving a zombie attack. A no-nonsense affair, this is also non-gamist, its discussion being actually useful if you happen to be American and subject to a zombie attack. It is accompanied by a shopping list suitable for any post-apocalyptic game. The second is short and counterpoints the first, being a discussion of the government leaflet. From the suggestions here along with the example, a ZM could easily create his own, which might just contain some useful advice, but it is a government leaflet . . .

In terms of production values, ***One Of The Living*** is up to Eden's usual standards. Certainly not exciting, but what others should be aspiring to: plain, simple, and easy to read.

Reading parts of ***One Of The Living*** is a sobering experience. It shows how easy it is for society to break down and how difficult the effort would be to survive, let alone thrive. But in this it addresses the preconception that ***All Flesh Must Be Eaten*** cannot be run as more than a one-shot, giving the ZM plenty of ideas to work with. These ask him to put more effort into the new longer game than other ***All Flesh Must Be Eaten*** supplements do, but in making such demands the ZM might just ensure that the cast members survive.

--Matthew Pook

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Behind the Musick

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Photomanipulations by Chad Underkoffler

Genre: Musical Urban Fantasy.

Style: Drama/Melodrama.

Fidelity: Recognizably the real world, with tweaks (minor in the open, major in the corners).

Theme(s): The Pursuit of Art, Fame, Money, Sex, and Power

The magic is in the musick, and the musick is in *you* in this Campaign in a Box.

What Everybody Knows

Nothing much -- as far as the average guy on the street is concerned, there's no difference between this setting and "the real world." Take Notes

What Every Musickian Knows

However, a few know differently. There are some musical performers that can do more with their talent than most people realize. They can break or mend hearts; soothe savage beasts; open wide or close tight the doors of perception; chant away memories or illness; summon, command, exorcize, and banish spirits; shatter or rebuild wills; and force the deepest powers of the universe (Luck, Time, Death) to dance to their tune.



These people work magic through music -- or *musick*, as it is called in some circles. (The "k" is audible, if you know what you're listening for.) Musick can usually only affect the essences of things --emotions, perceptions, memories, souls, etc. -- directly; by influencing beings in this way, they can cause indirect changes to the physical world. And, either way, this generally takes some time: time to play, time for the target to listen, time for the tune to work its magic.

Not every musician is a *musickian*. There's a certain mindset, a particular state of consciousness, that practitioners must achieve, modulated by specific rhythmic stresses and musical notes, which permits their power to spill forth effectively. Thus, there is a need for both a special outlook on the world alongside noteworthy mundane musical talent before one can whistle up spirits from the Otherworld. Someone who has the magickal outlook but no musical talent is called a *sharp*, while someone who has musical chops but no musickal juice is called a *flat* (though usually not within earshot, otherwise hilarity/violence ensues. . .).

For these reasons -- limited direct power, time required, small number of potential users -- the subculture of musickians is rather small, compared to everyday musical society. However, this means that there are still enough singers of spells (and clued-in but mundane associates) to fill the seats at a large concert hall. Given such a small pond, any strong, skilled, knowledgeable newcomer will soon grow to be a big fish -- with all that entails.

*"And I knew if I had my chance
That I could make those people dance
And, maybe, they'd be happy for a while."
-- Don McLean, "American Pie"*

"Do You Believe in Magic?"

Most mundane folks don't believe in out-and-out magic, even if they are a bit superstitious. This, unfortunately, leaves them with almost no defenses against musick. They are the Audience, not the players. The Audience can be one person, or a crowd of thousands. Given that there are few musickians out there and the vague nature of musickal effects, the Audience usually has little trouble rationalizing odd events away. "Coincidence, con, and caught up in the moment" are the three big explanations for musickal effects.

Of course, there's always the danger that the Audience will turn on the musickian (and even themselves), *en masse*. The results are never pretty -- actually, they're pretty tragic. Riots, assaults, murder -- think of Altamont and the Rolling Stones. If an unskilled musickian slips in his control, King Mob will turn very ugly.

Some average people are exceptionally susceptible to musick (the bobby-soxers over Sinatra, most of the teenaged girls in Ed Sullivan's audience over Elvis or the Beatles, Charles Manson and "Helter-Skelter," most of the folks who hear "Satanic" messages when playing music in reverse, etc.). Musickians call these groupies *Hamelin Rats*, or just *rats*, after the victims of the Pied Piper. And, as easy as it is to trap a rat in a net of notes, these fans can go so far under the musickian's spell that they become uncontrolled, motivated by the musickian's subconscious desires and fears instead of any deliberate commands.

"I'm Hearing Secret Harmonies"

So, what's it *like* to be a musickian?

You hear the musick of the spheres, the thrumming of the cosmos' engine, the backbeat of the universe. There's magic in your fingers, on your lips, within your heart, just waiting to break free and soar. You can potentially communicate -- and even control -- the invisible and mysterious aspects of the world with your talent.

*"I can snap my fingers and require the rain
From a clear blue sky and turn it off again
I can stroke your body and relieve your pain
And charm the whistle off an evening train. . ."*
-- Bob Dylan, "Silvio"

"Why Don't You Tell Your Dreams To Me / Fantasy Will Set You Free"

So, what exactly can musick *do*? Here are some general descriptions of musickal effects that a talented performer can create; these are just examples -- musick is limited only by the imagination, skill, and available energy of the musickian. (For suggestions on rules implementations, see *Musick Rules-of-Thumb* below.)

*Emotional feedback on
timeless wavelength:*

Performing, even alone, builds mystical energy. This energy can be used to refresh, cleanse, and heal the musickian, or to create musickal effects. Performing for an Audience, or playing alongside other musickians, increases the amount of energy generated.

*It doesn't matter what I
say / So long as I sing
with inflection:*

Influence the emotional state of an Audience, like shifting its mood from joy to sadness.

*Manipulator of crowds,
you're a dream twister:*

Insinuate strong suggestions in the mind(s) of the Audience, such as "Donate money to this charity."

*Well if it's true what
music can do / To soothe
the savage beast like they
say:*

Calm an angry or upset animal with a tune.

<i>There were voices down the corridor:</i>	Hear the conversation of ghosts and demons.
<i>She's got me so blind I can't see:</i>	Manipulate the perceptions of an Audience.
<i>Some dance to remember, some dance to forget:</i>	Tweak the memories of an Audience.
<i>Find out something only dead men know:</i>	Compel the dead to give up their secrets.
<i>Victim of venomous fate:</i>	Alter the luck of the Audience towards ill-fortune, temporarily.
<i>Bound by wild desire, / I fell into a Ring of Fire:</i>	Use the Audience's will to lock them into a continuing illusory experience.
<i>Let the echo decide if I was right or wrong:</i>	Discern truth from falsehood by listening to musickal echoes.
<i>And when he lets go, / Half the valley shakes:</i>	Spark an earthquake.
<i>If I could save time in a bottle:</i>	Stop the passage of time.

"You Give Something Up For Everything You Gain"

However, musick has its price. In addition to the raw talent, Eric! practiced skill, and mystical energy necessary to create musickal effects, performers also suffer other consequences:

But it's like trying to tell a stranger 'bout rock and roll: Trying to describe musick to an Audience is a losing proposition. Even with a demonstration, they will tend to ascribe the musickian's explanation to delusion, madness, or chicanery. They just don't Get It, man.

I should stay away but what can I do: All musickians are compulsively drawn (to a greater or lesser extent) to secrets, mysteries, riddles, and the forbidden. This curiosity is proportional to their skill in musick, and only fades if the character turns away from musick entirely.



Let the sound take you away: Unskilled or unlucky musickians may accidentally lose control of their performance. If not generating a musickal effect, they continue to play on and on and on, until they cannot absorb any more mystical energy and pass out from the head rush. If they get wrapped up in the spellsong when attempting musick, the mystical energy spins out of control, with random and dangerous results.

The players tried to take the field / The marching band refused to yield: If a musickian loses control of an Audience, the Audience usually turns on the performer, and sometimes itself.

Glittering prizes and endless compromises: With all this mystical influence at their fingertips, canny or lucky musickians can get nearly any mundane reward they desire: fame, fortune, sex, power. The attractions of these long sought-after goals sidetracks performers, moving them away from the pure pursuit of musick. Alas, as they focus on sating their desires, their musickal growth first slows, then stops, then dwindles. Life becomes a series of compromises

between following mystical perfection and fulfilling mundane needs (see below, *PC Opportunities, Musickians*).

Musick Rules-of-Thumb

While musickal ability can be mapped under several different game systems -- here's some rules-of-thumb that can be applied to any. (See also below, *Other Resources*, for a list of apt games to use for this Campaign in a Box.)

Difficulties of Musickal Effects

It's easier to affect some things with musick than others. Here's a short list of targets, with their relative difficulties. (Note that many systems will include some sort of resistance roll when targeting other characters with musick.)

1. *Typical*: Sway Emotions; Persuasive Speech; Summon/Banish Animals; Communicate with Animals, Plants, & Spirits.
2. *Tricky*: Supernatural Suggestion, Control Perceptions, Harm/Heal Spirits, Alter Memories, Discern Truth.
3. *Hard*: Overwhelm Will, Control Spirits, Create/Banish Illusions, Heal/Harm Living Things, Summon/Banish Natural Force (weather, earthquakes, temperature, tides, etc.), Bless/Curse (limited influence of good or bad luck), Temporary Enchantment.
4. *Very Hard*: Heal/Harm Unliving Things, Control Natural Force or Concept, Enchantment.

Depending upon the system, these difficulties can be used to set minimum skill levels or skill target numbers.

For example, these difficulties could be represented in *GURPS* as the minimum number of skill levels to achieve the effect: Typical (skill 10), Tricky, (skill 12), Hard (skill 14), Very Hard (skill 16). In *PDQ*, the difficulties translated pretty directly to Difficulty Ranks and Target Numbers: Typical (Average [7]), Tricky, (Good [9]), Hard (Expert [11]), Very Hard (Master [13]).

Musickal Modifiers

Several things can aid or hinder a musickian's performance:

Audience hostile to musickian	Large penalty
Character unable or unwilling to fully perform the song (finger-tapping instead of drumming with sticks, humming or instead of singing, toy guitar instead of Stratocaster, only enough time for a few measures, etc.)	Medium penalty
Affect a target not present	Medium penalty
Audience resistant to musickian(s)	Small penalty
Use of a historical/noteworthy instrument or sheet music	Small bonus
Audience is at least twenty times the number of musickians performing	Small bonus
Audience is at least four hundred times the number of musickians performing	Medium bonus
Audience is at least eight thousand times the number of musickians performing	Large bonus
Several musickians collaborate on effect	Small bonus, plus all bonuses individual musickians bring to the stage
Player describes effect only	Straight roll
Player describes effect and picks a particular song to perform	Small bonus

Player describes effect and sings/performs the specific lyric or chorus of song Medium bonus

Player describes effect and *multiple players* sing/perform the specific lyric or chorus of song Large bonus

Some of these bonuses and penalties could be replaced with increases or decreases in energy costs to generate supernatural effects; this choice is particularly apt for those involving an Audience or other musickians.

For example, these modifiers could be represented in **GURPS** as large penalty (-6), medium penalty (-3), small penalty (-1), small bonus (+1), medium bonus (+3), and large bonus (+6). In **PDQ**, the modifiers could be large penalty (3 Downshifts), medium penalty (2 Downshifts), small penalty (1 Downshift), small bonus (1 Upshift), medium bonus (2 Upshifts), and large bonus (3 Upshifts).

"We Are Spirits In The Material World"

By virtue of their power, musickians can communicate with and control *spirits*. The overwhelming majority of spirits are simply the ghosts of people who have died. While most peoples' souls zip away to parts unknown when life ceases, these dead folks are resisting the "pull" that seeks to draw them *inward* (which seems to be "bad") or *outward* (which seems to be "good"). This resistance usually stems from fear of the unknown, love for those they left behind, sheer stubbornness, or the gnawing of unfinished business.

Spirits are normally invisible and inaudible -- though musickians can see and hear them with mild effort. They are also naturally insubstantial (permitting them to pass through solid objects and float through the air). Electrical or magnetic fields are more difficult to phase through; thus, they can pass through solid stone faster than they could an electric fence. Very strong fields may be virtually impassible to a ghost.

Spirits can only affect the physical world through extreme concentration, permitting visibility, audibility, and the movement of objects. When manifesting, a ghost is as powerful as a strong man, who feels no pain and doesn't physically tire (most can lift heavy furniture, or throw appliances pretty hard). If a manifesting spirit loses concentration, they immediately return to their natural ethereal state. Though a ghost feels no pain, blowing one apart with a shotgun usually shatters its concentration and spatters the area with quickly evanescent ectoplasmic goo.

Spirits can *possess* living human and animal bodies, through a combination of phasing into the body and intense concentration. The initial phase-in is difficult due to the electrical activity of the brain, and retaining control is demanding due to the victim's mind fighting back. (However, if the victim is amenable to sharing the headspace; the ghost can remain for periods of up to a day without a break; sleep usually kicks a spectral tourist out of the victim's skull.) If concentration slips, the ghost pops out. Afterwards, many victims suffer confused memories of the period of their possession.

Any rhythmic noise draws a ghost's disembodied attention. This effect is stronger if the noise is musical, and doubly-so if it is musickal. Water dripping, birdsong, nursery rhymes, musickal spellsongs can all draw spirits, who bask in the sonic pattern. Indeed, musickal spellsongs can cause a spirit to lose concentration when manifesting physically or possessing someone. It's rumored that certain spellsongs can bliss a spirit out so much so that they forget to resist the "pull," and are yanked to their final reward, wherever that is.

However, there are rumors of a few powerful, mysterious beings out there that turn all of this knowledge on its ear. Musickians and spirits alike whisper and gossip and theorize about *angels* and *demons*, but there are no reports that are trusted. All that is known is that they're fierce, relentless, and strong.

*"A planet of playthings
We dance on the strings
Of powers we cannot perceive . . ."*
-- Rush, "Free Will"

What Everybody Doesn't Know

"Well, It May Be The Devil Or It May Be The Lord / But You're Gonna Have To Serve Somebody" The Trouble with Treble

In this setting, God and the Devil unequivocally exist. However, beyond that, few facts are known.

And pray that there's intelligent life somewhere up in space, / 'Cause there's bugger all down here on Earth: All human conceptions of both are inherently flawed: the attempts of three-dimensional biological beings constrained by linear time to describe and explain entities that are simply *beyond* their comprehension.



I guess you didn't know it / but I'm a fiddle player too: God and the Devil meddle in human affairs, directly -- but only through people with musickal talent. Both will send their agents (see below) to interact with, support, and oppose the actions of performers of musick.

I will choose a path that's clear: Of course, musickians can choose not to choose which side to follow, and simply live their lives as they see fit. When they die, they decide whether to resist the pull inward or outward, or go with the flow.

I've almost gained my Heavenly home, my spirit loudly sings: God is associated with the concept of "selflessness" and the "outward" direction that some spirits describe and resist moving towards. On occasion, He/She/It transforms a willing musickian into an angel (see below).

I've been around for a long, long year / Stole many a man's soul and faith: The Devil is associated with the concept of "selfishness" and the "inward" direction that some spirits describe and resist moving towards. On occasion, He/She/It transforms a willing musickian into a demon (see below).

Before you sell your soul, better do the math: Angels and demons are quite powerful beings; luckily there are only a bare handful of each on Earth. They are musickians who have agreed to serve God or the Devil permanently, and have given up aspects of their free will to become agents of these higher beings. They have *no choice* whether or not to follow any enigmatic dictates of their controller: they **absolutely** must. At some times, these commands may be relatively specific and limited ("Do not go to New York on Tuesday"), and at other times, they may be extremely general and universal ("Do not interfere with musickian David Nash"). Usually, this means that angels and demons are only suitable for NPCs; some GMs may wish to permit angelic or demonic PCs, provided the players understand they are agreeing to limit their actions.

Angel or demon . . . / still he calls her . . . : In essence, an angel or a demon is musickian who has been turned into a "ghost plus." That is, they share all of the ghostly abilities, but do not require concentration to manifest: they can flip between states at whim. Indeed, they're no longer strictly human, even when solid. They are quite strong, feel no pain, never tire, heal extremely quickly, and do not age or get sick. This means that if an angel or demon is blown apart by a shotgun into ectoplasmic goo, said goo *doesn't* evaporate, but hangs around until the entity reassembles itself physically or turns each and every tidbit insubstantial and reconnects in that way.

Additionally, they are still musickians, and can do magic with spellsongs. In some ways; this means that while they are even more susceptible than ghosts to rhythms, they *can* get around the deleterious effects of such sounds by using their own talent and extreme focus. Musickians can banish them with the appropriate musick, but -- unlike ghosts -- angels and demons can come back from their "final reward" after a variable period of time (usually known as "letting the echoes die away").

PC Opportunities

Musickian

Steve!

Most PCs in a "Behind the Musick" campaign should be musickians, probably all in the same band. They should have the ability to play an instrument or sing, and may have other performance or business skills. (Some game systems might require an additional Musickal Talent, to permit the use of mundane music skills to create musickal effects.) In addition, a musickian should have a weakness related to the pursuit of Art, Fame, Money, Sex, or Power, which serves as a temptation away from the mystical.



Spirit

Some GMs may permit ghost PCs. As mentioned above, ghosts are invisible, inaudible, and insubstantial normally. They may manifest to sight, sound, or touch with concentration. They feel no pain or fatigue. They may possess people with effort. They must constantly resist the "pull" to their afterlife, and are compulsively attracted to rhythmic noise and musick.

Angels and demons are generally not suitable for PCs, but if a player wishes to attempt a character who is constrained by the will of God or the Devil, GMs can permit it.

Clued-in Crew

Player may wish to play mundane but clued-in associates of one or more musickians. Some options include *manager* (handles the bookings, administration, and business aspects of the band), *roadie* (helps move and set-up equipment, and other ad hoc duties), *backup performers* (folks who share the stage with the musickian but have no mystical talent themselves), *driver* (the person who drives the tour van/bus from gig to gig), and the *sound engineer* (who runs the sound equipment). In most small or unknown bands, a single person could be responsible for the duties of multiple roles.

NPC Backgrounds

Each character below has their most important *strengths* (generally positive qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) and *weaknesses* (generally negative qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) detailed. In descending order, the ranks are Master, Expert, Good, Average, and Poor. Depending upon the conception of what a character is like, any quality can be a strength or a weakness.

For example, suppose a character has "Spoiled Brat" as a quality. If it's ranked Average or above, it's a strength: the character always gets his own way, can wield undue influence by threatening to sic their Mommy or Daddy on others, might possess lots of cash or gadgets, and people may fawn over them, making life easy. But if the character has "Spoiled Brat (Poor)," this is a weakness: the character has led a pampered and sheltered life, rubs people the wrong way, and expects everyone to bend over backward to fulfill his most minor needs.

Since many game mechanics provide prose "benchmarks" to understand stat or skill levels, the ranked qualities below should be easily adaptable into any desired system. (Also see [the PDQ System](#) from [Atomic Sock Monkey Games](#).)

Snake's Six

Snake's Six is a hard-rocking band on the fast track to being noticed by a major label in the near future. They're also deeply dedicated to seeking out mystic knowledge to aid their rise to the top of the charts. Musically and musickally, they can serve as rivals to any PC band.

Elizabeth Hardwood aka "Irish Liz": Liz is an Good Musickian, with skill in vocals and various percussion instruments. She sings lead on about a third of the songs of Snake's Six, and duets with Ed on another third. She's in it for the Fame (Poor at Resisting Fame). She's Good at Folk and Traditional Music Lore, Good at Classical Music Lore, and Good at Working the Crowd. She likes to play Ed and Tony off of one another.

Tony Hogg: Tony's a big brute of an Expert Bassist; unfortunately, he's not a musickian at all. He makes up for it by being an Expert at Mayhem -- all sorts. He's the guy you want at your back during a barfight, or to cause a distraction, or to rig another band's speakers to blow out mid-song. He's also Good at Being Very Loud. Tony's big weakness is that he's Poor at Turning Down the Sexual Advances of Groupies (male, female, vegetable, whatever). He's got a friendly rivalry with Ed.

Ludwig Georg aka "Indestructible": Indestructible Georg wants to be Keith Richards when he grows up. He has a Master-level Tolerance for Toxins due to long practice with recreational pharmaceuticals. He's a decent Rhythm Guitarist (Good) and a Handsome Bloke (Good). While not a musickian, he's often Tuned In to spiritual goings-on when he's flying high (Average).

Kevin P. Smedley aka "Kev": Kev's the keyboard and synth guy; he's a Good musickian and an Expert Composer (and writes the tunes for Ed's lyrics). He wants to be a rock star for the chicks, and is Poor at Resisting Sex -- and gets snippy when he sees Liz, Tony, Indestructible, and Ed get any play from a groupie. He's an Expert at Secret Rock History, and is the primary information source for when the band wants to seeks out some mystery-power.

Ed Snake: Dark and debonair, Ed is the front man and lead guitarist for Snake's Six. He sings lead on about a third of the songs of Snake's Six, and duets with Liz on another third. An Expert Musickian, he's the big mystical gun of the group. He's also an Expert Songwriter, and a Good Band Manager. This last is vital, because he's Poor at Resisting Greed -- only last minute spreadsheet chicanery or subtle spellsongs have kept his bandmates from catching on.

Richard Sodov aka "Ricky": Ricky's the drummer for Snake's Six, and fairly Average at it. He's Devotedly Loyal to Ed (Expert), has Good Criminal Contacts, and has a certain amount of Low Cunning (Expert). Ricky has a Poor Resistance to Being Possessed -- a weakness that Ed often exploits when he wants to deal with ghosts.

*"I have my ship
And all her flags are a flyin'
She is all that I have left
And music is her name."
-- Crosby, Stills, & Nash, "Southern Crosss"*

Locations & Items

Clubs

With a little modification, ["The Puzzle Box"](#) could serve as a good example for musickally-focused clubs. Some recommended changes:

- *Detailed Description:* Add a small stage and a small sound booth.
- *Adventure Seeds:* Change the "Dipsomancer on a bender" into a "singer-musickian on a bender."
- *Peppy Slade:* Peppy doesn't have a "Minor Rituals" skill; replace it with "Musickal History" skill; he could be considered a "Sharp" (see above).
- *Joachim Walker:* Ricky is just a ghost; and his "telekinesis" is simply jumping out of Joachim's body and manifesting (invisibly) to pick things up. Joachim's "Demon Lore" becomes "Ghost Lore."

The Black Guitar

The Black Guitar appears to be a Grand Concert "Antonio Grauso" 12-string guitar, circa 1913; spruce top, varnished

black, with mahogany sides and back, rosewood fingerboard, heart-shaped ivory inlays, and has a tarnished silver ornament on the headstock in the shape of a man's face. This ornament weeps oily, perfumed tears from its eyes when a hymn is played upon it. When played by a musickian, it is rumored that musick is much easier (reduce difficulty of effect by one step).

Unfortunately, the instrument appears to have a mind (and powers!) of it's own, and will "lose itself" (mentally influences owner or closest passersby to ignore it, move it, take it, or leave it somewhere) if the performer is performing musick with ill-intent, or if it senses an angel or demon within three miles. Some rumors claim that Guitar holds the soul of a musickian who attempted to evade his final reward; others state that this instrument was enchanted by a demon at a crossroads for a musickian, in return for his soul.

Events & Possible Story Arcs

Gigs & Festivals

New bands without name recognition call up a club's booking agent and try to get booked on off-nights (Tuesday through Thursday, usually). They may not receive any payment for this, just good word of mouth, to help build that all-important name recognition. Known bands have a better shot at getting an on-night slot, and may receive a cut of the door/cover charge; nights and percentages of the door/cover are usually proportional to the fame of the band. If a band is really top-notch, has signed with a company or label, and is widely-known, they *might* garner an extra appearance fee.

Festivals (and "battles of the bands") can play out much like gigs, with one major difference: there are several bands at festivals, providing ready-made opportunities for socializing and conflict with other musickians.

Labels, Companies, & Contracts

A good place to start looking for information on this is the Steve Albini article mentioned below in *Other Resources*.

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Style: Melodrama

Melodrama means "music drama" -- music is used to provide suggestions to characterization and mood, in order to increase an audience's emotional response to characters, locations, and events within the story. Consider a movie's soundtrack, where important characters have their own theme music or a swell of high-pitched music ratchets up the fear before the monster appears.

A melodramatic world is often dramatically serious, but unsubtle in terms of emotion and morality. (Interestingly, one major difference between melodrama and tragedy is said to be that happy endings are possible in the former, and impossible in the latter.) Anger is anger, joy is joy, good is good, and bad is bad -- completely and absolutely.

This simplicity can lead to the biggest pitfall of melodrama: outrageous or campy overacting, which is one of the reasons melodrama is often seen in a negative light. Another pitfall is melodrama's reliance on stock characters who develop little during the course of their adventures. Both can be ameliorated in a melodramatic campaign, if the GM injects a trace of ambiguity into the emotional and moral tenor of the adventures, and the players provide decent characterizations of their characters.

Magical Mystery Tour

A band of musickians (and their clued-in crew) traveling around the country or the world for gigs is a great cover for looking into musickal mysteries. Hanna-Barbera had a whole subgenre of adventuring bands following a "mystery of

the week" format -- from *Josie and the Pussycats*, to the Neptunes of *Jabberjaw*, to *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kids*, and on. This episodic set-up is fantastic for gaming groups who have large periods of time between sessions. Each mystery, with its locations and NPCs, is self-contained, encouraging the PCs to wrap up the action in one get-together.

Lyrical Inspiration

A great way to come up with adventures for a "Behind the Musick" campaign is to adapt a song. (A perennial example, used by many gaming groups over the years, is ["Hotel California"](#) by the Eagles; because it's so classic, building an adventure out of this song is left as an exercise for the reader.) Simply extract plot and characters from the song's lyrics, look for what the underlying questions and points of interest are, and decide how to fit it into the campaign, manipulating genre and period to fit.

In these campaigns, it could be assumed that all songs are *factual* -- if somewhat embroidered -- reportage. Musickians would spend their days tracking down the secret, mystical truths behind decades' worth of Top 40 hits.

["Tell Laura I Love Her"](#)

- Laura and Tommy were lovers.
- He wanted to propose, but was too poor to do so.
- He entered a stockcar race (as the youngest driver) in the hopes of winning the \$1,000 purse, without Laura's knowledge.
- He left a cryptic message with Laura's Mother.
- No one knows why he crashed and burned.
- He died proclaiming his undying love for Laura.
- Laura can hear Tommy's exclamation as she prays for him in the chapel.

Okay, there are three NPCs (Laura, Tommy, and Laura's Mom), a mysterious crash, and Laura in a church (psychological reverie, auditory hallucination, or ghostly manifestation?).

In a *CSI* or cop campaign, this could be a straight up mystery, with the PCs investigating the crash after the fact. Or in a "Fifties Teen Angst" sort of game, the events could unfold as part of a wider plot -- preppy teens vs. juvenile delinquent teens or adults vs. punk kids. A ghostbreaking campaign could focus on the ghost of Tommy that has been following Laura around for years. A science fiction campaign could change the stockcars to space-racers and the \$1,000 to 1,000 quatloos. And so on.

In this Campaign in a Box, the combination of the mysterious crash and a possible ghost is what should draw the attention of musickian PCs. It could be played out in "real time," with Tommy or Laura being friends or relations of the PCs, or long after the fact as a riddle to answer. Tommy or Laura's mother (or both!) could have been adept at using musick. What if Tommy was a Rock musickian and Laura's Mom was a Classical musickian, and the crash is a result of a musickal battle (Tommy lost)?

["Carolina in My Mind"](#)

- Locale: Carolina.
- Friend hits [Narrator] from behind: camaraderie? betrayal?
- Karen = Silver Sun -- mystical adept?
- The sky is on fire; [Narrator] dying.
- Did Karen backstab [Narrator] to drain his musickal talent into her, sending him to Carolina/Heaven?
- Omens (flying geese, biting dogs) indicating a journey.
- "Holy host of others" = the dead? Angels?
- "Dark side of the moon" = [Narrator] is trapped between worlds, and cannot ascend to his just reward, due to Karen's treachery.

Some other tunes, short and sweet:

"Highwayman":

- Who is the Highwayman? Demon, immortal, or reincarnatee?
- Who *wouldn't* want to talk to this guy? He seems to know a bunch of mysteries of life and death. . .
- Maybe he (his spirit) needs to be freed from within the structure of the Boulder Dam?
- What about the "starship" lyric? Is he precognitive? Hey, maybe he's a long-lived, shipwrecked alien trying to become an astronaut so he can hijack a rocket and get back to his distant planet? (Thank you, [Issac Asimov](#).)

"L.A. Woman": A mystical serial killer's attempts to bloodily incarnate an avatar of the spirit of Los Angeles as a female.

"Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite": Circus (that should make this one a "go" right there). The Hendersons are musickians; Mr. Kite is not, but is the target of some sort of ritual. "Mr. K. will challenge the world!" and "As Mr. Kite flies through the ring" and "And tonight Mr. Kite is topping the bill" -- Mr. K attempts ascension?

"Come Fly With Me": Globetrotting for musickal knowledge -- "In lama (misspelling for "llama," or have we jumped from Peru to Tibet?) land, there's a one man band / And he'll toot his flute for you."

"This Is The Song That Never Ends, It Just Goes On And On My Friends. . ."

Pull out your vinyl LPs and 45s, your 8-tracks and cassettes, your CDs and your mp3s, crank the volume to **11**, and get ready to rock!

Other Resources

Game System Suggestions

- *Buffy: the Vampire Slayer* (Eden Studios)
- *Dead Inside* (Atomic Sock Monkey Press)
- *Dogs in the Vineyard* (Lumpley Games)
- *GURPS Voodoo* or *GURPS Spirits* (Steve Jackson Games)
- *In Nomine* (SJ Games)
- *Unknown Armies* (Atlas Games)
- *World of Darkness* (White Wolf)
- *Wyrd is Bond* (Key 20)

Musical Bits of Interest

- Albini, Steve. ["The problem with music"](#)
- Burns, Eric. ["Day's going fine, and I'm totally geeking out on RPG thinking"; "In Nobilis Inside: the core principles of the merged game";](#) and ["The Aesthetics of Stupidity in RPG Development"](#)
- ["The Day the Music Died"](#)
- [Devil's Interval](#)
- Foster, Alan Dean. [Spellsinger](#) and [The Hour of the Gate](#)
- [Tommy Johnson](#) and [Robert Johnson](#) (no relation)
- [Josie and the Pussycats](#) (at tvtome.com)
- Miéville, China. *King Rat*.
- [Mondegreens](#)
- Obrecht, Jas. ["Joe Walsh Carries On"](#)
- [O Brother, Where Art Thou?](#)

[Six-String Samurai](#)

- [Snopes on "Hotel California"](#)

Lyrics

(NOTE: Many of the lyrics sites listed below generated large number of pop-up ads, as of this writing.)

- <http://bobdylan.com/songs/jokerman.html>
- <http://bobdylan.com/songs/serve.html>
- <http://bobdylan.com/songs/silvio.html>
- <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/rush/thespíritofradio.html>
- <http://www.geocities.com/ironwallcoleman/songs/hook.htm>
- <http://www.lyricsdepot.com/boston/more-than-a-feeling.html>
- <http://www.lyricsdepot.com/bread/welcome-to-the-music.html>
- <http://www.lyricsdepot.com/johnny-cash/folsom-prison-blues.html>
- http://www.lyricsdepot.com/monty_python/galaxy-song.html
- <http://www.lyricsdepot.com/queen/a-kind-of-magic.html>
- <http://www.lyricsdepot.com/santana/black-magic-woman.html>
- <http://www.lyricsdepot.com/steppenwolf/magic-carpet-ride.html>
- <http://www.lyricsdepot.com/the-charlie-daniels-band/the-devil-went-down-to-georgia.html>
- http://www.lyricsdomain.com/9/ice_cube/the_curse_of_money.html
- <http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/barbra-streisand/13256.html>
- <http://www.lyricsfreak.com/e/eagles/44469.html>
- http://www.oldielyrics.com/lyrics/crosby_stills_nash/cathedral.html
- http://www.oldielyrics.com/lyrics/crosby_stills_nash/southern_cross.html
- http://www.oldielyrics.com/lyrics/neil_diamond/brother_loves_traveling_salvation_show.html
- <http://www.seeklyrics.com/lyrics/Phantom-Of-The-Opera/Wandering-Child.html>
- http://www.songlyrics4me.com/artist_f/frank-sinatra_lyrics/luck-be-a-lady_lyrics.html
- <http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/amightywind/whenyourenexttome.htm>

* * *

Special Thanks to Steve Archer of [Ego Likeness](#) and Eric A. Rowe

This Column's Title

Since I'm about 90 minutes out from going to Michigan for the weekend, so I'm trying to get the entire issue together beforehand. As such, I'm going to see about setting a new land speed record for writing this column. Since I can write 60 words a minute at a good clip, I figure this should be done in less time than it takes to decide on a pizza order among a group of any four random humans.

Anyway, in combing over the Random Thought Table archives, I'm amazed that (as best I can tell) I've never discussed the notion of titles for campaigns, adventures, or the like.

Of course, in thinking over how such a column might go, I realized why. Because the sum total of my advice -- at least, for the first 283 weeks of my column -- would be, "Umm . . . it might be a good idea to title your adventures or campaigns. That's one to grow on. Yo, Joe."

However, much of that changed today, since -- at my Day Job -- we spent three hours trying to come up with a name for our new setting (due for a November release). After ramming our heads into the wall over and over, pursuing various avenues that we felt captured the flavor of the setting, I finally came up with the two-word title that everyone seemed to like. Having done so, I immediately demanded just compensation for my writing prowess . . . at which point the boss dutifully pulled out a dime and handed it to me, thus fulfilling a \$0.05/word rate.

Anyway, as we sat around, I came to realize many things about titles. Most of this advice probably won't be of any use to you all in coming up with titles for your games, but I lost 180 minutes of my life wrapping my mind around this stuff, so I figure *someone* should get some use out of it.

Anyway, most books -- as in, "novels" -- consist of words that are relatively straightforward, albeit combined in interesting ways. For example, *Like Water For Chocolate* is a title that can be spelled by your average third grader, but that particular phrase is one that probably hasn't been used previously. The same can be said for *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, or *The Da Vinci Code*.

The exception to this seems to be science fiction/fantasy series, which -- in the era of multi-book cycles and series -- are often known by the saga name. Sci-fi series usually follow the "movie simple" naming convention (described below): *Dune*, *2001*, *Foundation*, *Gateway* while fantasy series are usually a bit wordier or more complicated (*Lord of the Rings*, *Dragonlance*, *Song of Ice and Fire*, *Incarnations of Immortality*). Regardless, both types of these genre novels seem to follow the general naming convention trends of novels, although coupled with their series name they come off as more complicated or pretentious, with a final result like, *Blades of the Clockwork Eventide*, *Leaf Seven of the Blade-Tree Timekeeper Chronicle*. Of course I'm mind-numbingly simplifying here, and there are no doubt enough counterexamples to all these trends for a one-to-one correspondence with visible stars.

Movies, in contrast to novels, almost always have as short a name as possible (at least, those not based on books). More interestingly, they usually have even simpler words. While a book will often have a phrase, movies usually have maybe two words, usually an enigmatic single word or a curious juxtaposition of two words. (c.f. *Chasing Amy*, *Panic Room*, *Cannonball Run*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *The Rock*, *The Island*, *The Matrix*, *The Notebook*, and so on. In the future, every noun will have its own movie. I'm personally awaiting *The Tonsil*, *Squirrel?* and *Thumbtack!*)

(As an aside, here's a fun quiz. What's the movie with the most complicated word in it you can think of? The best we came up with was *The Andromeda Strain*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Madagascar*, and *Vertigo*. Can you do better?)

Computer games have two parallel naming conventions, either tending toward even *simpler* names (*Doom*, *Quake*, *Half-Life*, *Halo*, *Myth*, *Pirates!*) or else having strangely complicated names (a recent trip to a computer site popped up *RYL: Path of the Emperor*, *Mega Man Battle Network 5: Team Protoman*, *Boiling Point: Road to Hell* and *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*).

Computer games and science fiction/fantasy novels do share one trend that's somewhat unique: a love for fictitious

words, especially those that compound two or more real words.

Comic books have a curiously inordinate propensity to use "X," "Bat," "Super," or "Spider" somewhere in the title.

Television series follow the same naming convention of movies (*Taxi*, *Cheers*, *Friends*, *Scrubs*, *Star Trek*, *Smallville*, *Firefly*) although there's a greater tendency to use proper names somewhere in the title (*Alice*, *Monk*, *Seinfeld*, *The Sopranos*, *The _____ Show*). Curiously, episode names -- when they're used -- are often fairly complex, although more bland than their novel counterparts ("Seinfeld Makes a Sandwich" or the like).

Quite possibly the only common naming convention where it's commonplace to have a difficult-to-spell, non-word name is in band names. The Beatles, Megadeth, Cruxshadows, and Negativland are all examples of names that would be put down like dogs if someone tried to entitle a book with one of them.

(As an aside, I knew that I was officially no longer "with" the music scene when I picked up a compilation sampler CD and, after several long minutes, concluded that I couldn't tell what half of the back cover contained the band names and what half had the song titles, since both sides had names like "Nurse Fire Fantasy" and "Eight O'Clock Rampage.")

What's the upshot for all this? Well, if you're titling a campaign (which I think is a good idea -- Hail Hydra!), the flavor of the campaign can be drastically influenced by trying to craft a title comparable to the medium or genre you're trying to emulate. Let's take a nuanced but not impossible example, by considering the following titles:

- The Shadow Architects
- The Shadow Plan
- The Shadow Planners
- Architects of a Better Shadow
- Shadow of the Architechnicians

Although built on roughly the same words, each title conveys a different sense. For example, "The Shadow Plan" sounds like an action movie or high-pulp spy title, "Shadow Planners" sounds like a television series, "Architects of a Better Shadow" sounds like a book (or perhaps a "build a new tomorrow"-type campaign), and "Shadow of the Architechnicians" sounds like a gritty sci-fi book series, maybe a cyberpunk one.

Giving serious thought to titles can especially help with [campaign prospectuses](#) or other situations where you want to give players a snapshot "feeling" about a new campaign . . . or to give them a hook to use for discussing the game. ("Say, what did I miss last week at the Shadow Planners session?")

And, if nothing else, you might stumble onto you band's new name . . . something like "Archishad."

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Fright Night: What Went Down (for the d20 System)

Published by [Hogshead Publishing](#)

Written by Brian Underhill with Ian Hunt

Cover by Shaun Thomas

Illustrated by Shaun Thomas & David Esbri

64-page perfect-bound black and white book; \$15.95

Where *Fright Night: Polar Terror* is set in the Antarctic, *Fright Night: What Went Down* is its northern counterpart, being set in the frigid waters under the Arctic ice cap. Like the rest of the *Fright Night* series, it is a one-shot for the **d20 System** and inspired by certain horror movies. It is designed with completeness in mind, providing suitable new character classes, plus rules for handling horror and fear under the **d20 System**, and a new threat that could find its way into other games or adventures in the form of a sequel.

The set-up for *What Went Down* is simple -- a Russian submarine has been lost whilst operating below the polar ice cap. Whilst its emergency locator beacon has been detected, the *Koloss'* exact location remains unclear. Unfortunately the Russian Navy lacks the means to attempt a rescue. Yet political considerations force the Russian government's hand and they accept the outside aid, not from the Americans or British, but from Rotterdam-based Sea Tech International. This marine engineering and salvage company operates world-wide and happens to own a prototype vehicle, the ST1 DSRV-1, nicknamed the *Erebus*, a deep submergence rescue vehicle that has the range to reach the *Koloss* and the capacity to carry up to 36 passengers.

The other player characters take the roles of Sea Tech employees who have volunteered to take the *Erebus* on the rescue mission. Represented by the scenario's six new classes, the characters are Marine Biologists, Navy Veterans, Paramedics, Pilots, Rescue Divers, and Salvage Operators. They have working experience on and below the sea surface, and thus the knowledge and expertise to conduct the rescue. What they lack though is knowledge of Russian navy submarines, in this case the *Oscar II*-class nuclear powered attack submarine. This is where their passengers come in useful: Captain Alexi Korkin of the Russian Navy, two Russian navy divers, and at the last minute, a Russian oceanographer. Under somewhat strained circumstances the *Erebus* sets out.

What Went Down is designed for groups of three to six player characters for first to third levels. Like all **d20 System** titles from Hogshead Publishing, it is also designed for use with straight *Dungeons & Dragons* rather than the more complex **d20 Modern RPG**. For some, this may be a problem. The **d20 Modern RPG** would also allow for the creation of more detailed and well-rounded characters, which the six new classes do not quite reflect. They are instead very career focused and backed up with four new feats that represents the character's prior experience. These background feats are Marine Science, Navy, Oilrig, and Salvage Background, each giving a +2 bonus with several skills and possibly a further feat. Representing a quick-and-dirty method of handling prior experience, suitable for the one-shot nature of a *Fright Night* scenario. Used outside of *What Went Down*, they are perhaps a little too short and dirty. That said, they are an improvement over those that appear in the publisher's *Crime Scene* series.

Besides the new classes, feats, and skills, *What Went Down* includes guidelines on natural dangers present in the adventure. Not just the fact that it is underwater, but also that it is extremely cold, and while either is potentially lethal, when combined, the effect is even deadlier. Possible weapons are discussed and whilst the *Koloss* does have an

armoury, getting to it is another matter. Instead, the characters will have to resort to jury rigged or scavenged affairs.

Rules for handling fear and horror are as per the standard for the *Fright Night* series. The adventure itself takes the *Erebus'* crew and her passengers to the *Koloss'* location on the seabed. She is cracked and partially flooded, cold and seemingly lifeless. Once aboard, achieved with the begrudging permission of the Russians, the vessel is a scene of chaos. Bodies are found, savagely wounded, and when surviving sailors are encountered they react violently. In the dark and damp of the *Koloss*, this should be a frightening series of encounters for the player characters, and in the hands of an experienced GM possesses plenty of potential.

Like the movies it is inspired by, ***What Went Down*** is roughly linear. Apart from certain events it is not scripted, and the GM should be in the main reacting to the player's actions. This gives eeway to insert the several adventure seeds at an appropriate time. These cover such possibilities as losing the *Erebus*, restarting the *Koloss'* reactor, and suddenly very obsessive scientists. Surviving the situation within the walls of the titanium-hulled coffin will force the players to think on their feet. This is very much in keeping with the ethos of the ***Fright Night*** series and its movie inspirations. Where in another game, the characters might escape their predicament with the application of lead poisoning, here they are forced to find other solutions.

Physically ***What Went Down*** is not as good as it could have been, a problem that has beset Hogshead's other books. While well-written, the artwork is invariably poorly handled, either lacking definition or being inappropriate. Three weapons are described, all of them Russian, so why does an illustration of an American carbine appear? And why is a picture of a Russian pistol used over and over? Further, the book is all but bereft of maps. A map showing where the *Koloss* went down would have made an excellent player handout. Nor are there any plans of the *Erebus*, or even an illustration of her. Neither is absolutely necessary, but both would prolong the usefulness of ***What Went Down*** beyond its actual adventure. So would clear, decent deck plans of the *Koloss*, also absent. What is given is indistinct and only serves to give the GM a feel for the submarine's layout.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

As to the exact nature of the threat in ***What Went Down***, it is best hinted at rather than being fully described here. The adventure's inspiration should be hint enough: *The Abyss* and *Night of the Living Dead*. Watching or familiarity with either should give some pointers as to the adventure's tone and atmosphere. And *The Hunt For Red October* should also be useful as well as entertaining. Indeed, although designed for a contemporary setting, the adventure could easily be set in during Russia's Soviet era. It is certainly inspired by the loss of the *Kursk*, which it touches upon a little in the adventure. But since the loss of the submarine in ***What Went Down*** is due to causes other than human error or technical fault, the scenario does not exploit that source of inspiration.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

What the scenario really lacks is GM advice on handling certain aspects that will affect adventure's mood and tone, and in particular the mental state of the characters. While this isn't a problem for experienced GMs, but for the less experienced, it is another matter. This dearth of advice to stage the small aspects of the adventure's horror is its main weakness.

Yet ***What Went Down*** is a very likeable affair, strong on atmosphere and possessing a stark brutalism very in keeping with the setting. Indeed, the story at the heart of this book could be run as a Deadworld for ***All Flesh Must Be Eaten***, or adapted to the RPG of your choice. Ultimately a fine evening's entertainment but a pity about the frills that would have made ***Fright Night: What Went Down*** useful beyond its pages.

--Matthew Pook

Enter the Dagon

"[M]y rescuers knew nothing; nor did I deem it necessary to insist upon a thing which I knew they could not believe. Once I sought out a celebrated ethnologist, and amused him with peculiar questions regarding the ancient Philistine legend of Dagon, the Fish-God; but soon perceiving that he was hopelessly conventional, I did not press my inquiries."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "Dagon"

Like Lovecraft's narrator, we shall amuse ourselves with peculiar questions. Unlike him, we shall press our inquiries. We shall see if an unfamiliar continent emerges from the sea and the slime, or if we must be satisfied with a trail through the ooze, and broken hands upon the threshold. Get out the high-test line and cast wide for Dagon.

*"Dagon his Name, Sea Monster, upward Man
And downward Fish: yet had his Temple high
Rear'd in Azotus, dreaded through the Coast
Of Palestine, in Gath and Ascalon
And Accaron and Gaza's frontier bounds."*
-- John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I: 462-466

If we all know one thing about Dagon, it's what Milton knew -- he's a Sea Monster. Dagon's depiction as a merman goes back at least to St. Jerome, who based it on the notion that Dagon's name came from the Hebrew *dag*, meaning "fish." (The "-on" part gets glossed as "sun," "sadness," "young," or "lord" depending on who's glossing it.) In the 19th century, archaeologists in Syria and Mesopotamia stumbled upon coins and a few seals depicting a fish-man -- obviously, Dagon, and never mind the lack of labels or other evidence. But Dagon would not be hooked so easily as that. Eventually, someone noticed that the almost as distinguished Eusebius transmits a tradition that referred to Dagon as the corn-god. Shortly thereafter, spoilsport linguists pointed out that *dagan* actually means "grain" in Hebrew, just as *dagnu* means grain in Ugaritic, and that unlike the putative mer-deity, there are scads of references to the fertility god Dagan throughout the Fertile Crescent.

The earliest such references date back to about 2500 B.C. at Mari in the upper Euphrates valley; over the next thousand years, worship of Dagan spread to Ugarit on the coast and thence south to, apparently, the Philistines and Phoenicians. In Mari and Ebla, Dagan was the "lord of the gods," worshiped at the "house of the Star" from whence his priests emerged to give prophetic advice to kings. Sargon of Akkad, Hammurabi, Naram-Sin, and Ashurnasirpal II all credited Dagan with some of their conquests. In various myths, Dagan became the father of Baal (who rapidly supplanted him in Ugarit), prison warder of the underworld, and "lord of sacrificial victims." His wife was variously known as Shala, Ishara, or (in the west) [Atargatis](#).

*"When the terrestrial and aquatic fish
Is beached by a strong wave,
Its form strangely attractive, yet horrific,
Emerging from the sea, the enemies soon at the walls."*
-- Nostradamus, *Centuries*, I:29

Who, especially under her Greek title Derceto, is almost always pictured as a mermaid. Interestingly, around 1750 B.C., the Mari records mention Dagan's promise (made in a dream) to "have the kings of the Yaminites cooked on a fisherman's spit." Suddenly, Dagon's fishy self comes roaring back, and it gets even fishier. Because the Chaldean historian Berossus, when discussing the ichthyoid god Oannes, apparently mentions another god, "having the same complicated form between a fish and a man," named Odakon. O, Dagon, indeed. And what did Oannes and Odakon do after emerging from the sea? Why, they built cities and taught mankind how to grow grain, just as Eusebius reports about Dagon. Which makes it even more interesting that in the archaeological record the name "Dagan" appears well before the word *dagan* is used for "grain" -- almost as if the grain was named for the god, rather than the other way around.

Robert Temple's marvelous *Sirius Mystery* says that Oannes and Odakon -- also known as "the repulsive ones," the

Annedoti -- were [Nommo](#) aliens from Sirius. Much like Lovecraft's Dagon, they seeped down from the stars (remember Dagan's "House of the Star" in Ebla?) and interfered with mankind, cultivating us like . . . well, like so much grain. [Nostradamus'](#) quatrain above seems to eerily echo the Oannes-Dagon legend -- did his vision quest look back as well as forward? That might explain another odd coincidence; in Century III:21, he mentions that "by the Adriatic Sea will appear a horrible fish with its face human and its lower body aquatic." And just off the Adriatic coast, in the anomalously advanced Lepenski Vir culture of ca. 6500 B.C., what do we find carved into sandstone idols? Fish-gods.

"When the Philistines took the Ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the Ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the Ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him. Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day."
-- 1 Samuel 5:2-5

But enough of nameless gods and lost civilizations. Let's get back to Dagon, who when we left him around 1200 B.C. or thereabouts had just become the chief god of the Philistines. Unfortunately for Dagon, the Philistines were trying conclusions with Yahweh, the storm-and-mountain god of the Hebrews. In their first tussle, it might be called a draw - - Dagon did, after all, capture Yahweh's solar champion Samson, bound and blinded at Gaza. Although Samson pulled Dagon's house down, would such a mass death during a feast of Dagon really discomfit the "lord of sacrificial victims?" But the second round was worse. When the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant (which Robert Graves, based on nothing whatsoever, describes as "covered in the skins of sea monsters") they brought it to Dagon's temple at Ashdod as a trophy. And as the Bible reassures us, Dagon fell on his fishy face, losing his head and both hands, leaving only the "stump of Dagon" intact. Interestingly, the specific Hebrew words of Samuel say that "only Dagon was left upon him," implying that the human face and hands were not truly Dagon in some fashion. Were they growths? Parasites? Waldoes and interfaces? Severed sacrificial mummy parts? (The Philistines also displayed the [severed head](#) of Saul at Dagon's temple.) A mask of some kind, meant to hide Dagon's "horrible" true face, like the mask of the alien mi-go in Lovecraft's "Whisperer in Darkness"?

"To fashion myself in the image of an old god,' he murmured. 'That is a crass way of putting it. There are no old gods. There are only new gods, gods builded out of our invincible wills and forced by the strength of intelligence into the domains of high powers."
-- Westcott, in *The Place Called Dagon*, by Herbert Gorman

Yahweh cuts Dagon back, trimming him from manlike grain god to his essential fish self. Kabbalistically, you can read "DGWN" two ways -- a large value, with the terminal-N, or a small value without it. "DGWN" equals 713 with the terminal-N value -- the same as "ShBThAY," or [Saturn](#). Saturn, of course, was the Roman god of agriculture, the king of the gods overthrown by Jupiter (as Dagon was by Yahweh) and sent into exile in the West. And there's another connection as well -- Eusebius' source, Philo of Byblos, ties Saturn and Dagon together explicitly, saying that Saturn and Dagon are brothers, both sons of Ouranos. Overthrown, we recalculate Dagon's value, without the terminal-N (without his head and hands) as 63, the value of "feces" -- the repulsive matter at the center of both grain and fish. Judah Maccabee burns down Dagon's temple at Ashdod, now called Azotus, in 163 B.C., but Dagon has shifted once more. (The Arabic word *dajjan* means "cloudy.") In Gaza, he is Marnas, "the lord," identified by Hadrian as Jupiter Cretagenes. Jupiter, son of his old incarnation Saturn; Dagon continues to slide down his own genetic line. In 402, the Empress Eudoxia orders Dagon Marnas' temple burnt to the ground with pitch and lime. Surely Dagon is gone forever.

"They also set up a May-pole, drinking and dancing about it many days together . . . like so many fairies, or furies rather, and worse practices. As if they had anew revived & celebrated the feasts of the Roman Goddess Flora, or the beastly practices of the madd Bacchanalians. Morton likewise (to shew his poetrie) composed sundry rimes & verses, some tending to lasciviousness, and others to the detraction & scandal of some persons, which he affixed to this idle or idol May-pole. They changed also the name of their place, and in stead of calling it Mounte Wollaston, they call it Merie-mounte, as if this jollity would have lasted ever. But this continued not long, for . . . that worthy gentleman, Mr. John Endicott . . . visiting those parts caused that May-pole to be cutt downe, and rebuked them for their profaness,

and admonished them to looke ther should be better walking; so they now, or others, changed the name of their place againe, and called it Mounte-Dagon."

-- William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation*

But Dagon is still there, mutilated but preserved in Yahweh's own scripture, immortal parasite on his overthrower's glory. Dagon's number 63 is the number of the "prophet," the seer in dreams, like the man of Mari or Nostradamus -- or [H.P. Lovecraft](#), who dreamed of the coming of Dagon in 1917 and wrote it down. Dagon thus bubbles through timeless dimensions, broken and even bowed but always returning to "the stump of Dagon" to be reborn. He lurks under the surface of history, dubious and debatable. The "sea-born" Merovingians, who bore the (Innsmouth?) "mark" of their blood, no doubt picked the name "Dagobert" for their kings from Frankish words for "bright sun," but having witnessed Dagon's linguistic gymnastics, can we be sure? Is there a connection between Dagon's unseemly fertility and the Grail, or is King Arthur's fool named "Sir Dagonet" for some other reason? Does Dagon the fertility god hold the secret of life? Is the alchemical secret, the Elixir Vitae, thus known as "Azoth" after Dagon's city Azotus? Why do the Templars build a castle on the "hill of Dagon" outside Jericho? Just why does Morton's [Dionysiac cult](#) in Massachusetts, driven underground, its maypole a mutilated stump, become "Mounte-Dagon"?

Here's one last cluster of data, one last foam of bubbles on the surface of history. The first Earl of Shaftesbury, one of the proprietors of North Carolina (where, interestingly enough, Fred Chappell's novel *Dagon* is set), supported Monmouth's rebellion in 1682 and was exiled for it. An anonymous ballad entitled "Dagon's Fall" celebrated his destruction. It purported to be about "Anthony, King of Poland" -- Shaftesbury's name was Anthony, which is fair enough. (It's unlikely, however, that a London balladeer knew that the first duke of Poland was named Dagon before he was baptized as Mieszko I.) The *fourth* earl of Shaftesbury, 60 years later, gave a private reading of Milton's *Samson Agonistes* at which Georg Friedrich Handel began composing -- almost as if possessed -- an oratorio on Samson in the house of Dagon. Immediately after he finished it, Handel went to Dublin for a concert series at Mr. Neale's Great Musick Hall -- on Fishamble Street. Upon his return in 1743, he conducted *Samson* -- and almost immediately suffered a "Paralytic Disorder," a palsy of the -- wait for it -- head and hands. Let's leave the last word for Handel's librettist Charles Jennens: "it is reported that being a little delirious with a Fever, he said he should be damn'd for preferring Dagon . . . before the Messiah." And He shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah! Amen.

Xoxhunt

for *Transhuman Space*

by Steve Horgan

Preparation

This adventure is for the *Transhuman Space* setting, but could easily be changed to fit another sci-fi genre. Locations and parties can also be changed within the setting to fit into an ongoing campaign, or because the GM likes it better. Any large 4th or 5th wave city could serve as the backdrop for example. With a bit more thought the scenario concept could be translated offworld, though it would probably have to be a moon or planet location, such as Luna or Mars, as opposed to an asteroid or habitat.

It is assumed that the PCs are either work for Executive Decisions Incorporated, p. TS94, or for another security agency that has a good working relationship with EDI. They may also be a freelance group that has either worked for EDI before or has a very good reputation for decisive covert action.

Ingredients

The Job

An urgent message is received from the EDI European office in Berlin, calling the PCs to London immediately, with an onsite briefing on arrival. If the team already works for EDI then this how they earn their salary. If they don't then the job rates \$10,000 a head plus all necessary expenses, including the quickest air transport that can be arranged if that is required. Note that 5th wave airports are CR5 and security is extremely tight. It is effectively very difficult to smuggle illegal weapons or other materials through them and attempts to do so are treated very seriously.

In London the PCs are directed to an EDI safe house, a top floor apartment in a terraced three-story building in Maddox Street. A streetmap for a suitable area location can be found [here](#).

The apartment was rented while the team was in transit and is within striking distance of the likely target at the Ritz Hotel, which lies to the South. Once at Maddox Street, they receive a briefing via VR, the key points are:

- A Xox has escaped from an asteroid research station in the Main Belt where EDI have the security contract. Dr. Abdu Jinjiri, a ghost, had illegally copied himself in order to have the best possible laboratory assistant. While the station authorities were disturbed by this they considered the benefit of a new and capable employee outweighed the ethical difficulties. Dr. Jinjiri escaped with a mild censure.
- However, the Xox has become unhappy with its position and has engineered an unauthorized departure, hacking into the station's security system to gain control of a laser communicator and then beaming itself to Earth.
- It used Dr. Jinjiri's identity and funds to gain entry to the UK and to rent a cyberdoll, p. TS122, before the escape was discovered.
- EDI's employers are very keen that this matter be handled discreetly, with the Xox recaptured and either returned to the lab or, if necessary, deleted. As an illegal Xox, the target also has every incentive to avoid the attention of the authorities.
- Since arrival in London the Xox has accessed another bank account that Dr. Jinjiri keeps secret, mainly from his ex-wife. However, it is EDI's job to know about things like this and they have been tracking the transactions.
- The Xox drew \$1,000 in cash, a little odd in a 5th wave city, and then used normal credit transactions to obtain a room at the Ritz hotel in central London and to engage a private security company called Peregrine Protection. It paid Peregrine \$10,000 for unspecified services. Research on Peregrine suggests that it specializes in bodyguard

and protection work for corporate and celebrity clients.

- Once in London, the objective is to snatch the Xox and return with it the safe house, where the Xox will be subject to a "technical debriefing" by an EDI specialist. The specialist will arrive at the Maddox Street location in approximately one hour.

A minimum level of legal Equipment is available at the safe house; London is a CR3 city. Bear in mind that this mission was thrown together in a hurry, so very specialist items will not be present regardless of legality. Weapons to hand are electrolasers, which are legal, and pistols, which are not. The team can use any skills that they have to attempt to acquire anything else of course but EDI are very keen that the mission progresses rapidly and will not allow an extended delay.

London

A streetmap usable for the Ritz location and surrounding area can be found [here](#).

This is central London, less crowded than in the early 21st century but not subject to the radical de-civilization effects of some other cities. Public surveillance is used on a need only basis, but the areas to the south of the Ritz that are around Buckingham Palace or near any of the Royal Houses along the Mall have intensive real-time LAI monitoring. Any suspicious and especially any armed activity there will result in an immediate police response that will escalate very rapidly if the problem appears serious.

North, east, and west of the Ritz there is traffic monitoring on the major roads but no comprehensive surveillance. By 21st century standards traffic is light. The parks do not have surveillance except where they abut onto Royal Palaces and Houses as previously stated.

The Metropolitan Police ("the Met") are the main police presence but there are army sentries on the Royal locations. If an incident occurs then the escalation ladder is as follows:

1. **Metropolitan Police, normal police patrol/response:** Two to four officers, a mix of baseline and genemodified humans and bioroids, with police armguns, p. TS155, and medium nanoweave vests, p. TS159.

Army sentries, static positions around Royal sites only: For to 10 per location though only 2-4 will usually be on post at any one time, a mix of baseline and genemodified humans and bioroids, with battle rifles, p. TS155, and heavy nanoweave vests, p. TS159, under full dress uniforms.

2. **Metropolitan Police, backup:** Two to four officers as #1, above, in a marked police Air Car, p. TS193 2-4 buzzbots, p. TS121, with NAI control and real-time VR feed to both the officers on the ground and central control.
3. **Metropolitan Police, Tactical Firearms Unit:** Six to 10 officers, in marked police Air Cars, p. TS193, a very capable mix of humans, bioroids and bioshells running SAIs and ghosts, with battle rifles, p. TS155, heavy nanoweave suits, p. TS159 and light infantry helmets, p. TS160.

Two to four RATS, p. TS124, with electrolaser rifles, p. TS155, and 15mm mini-missile pods, p. TS155: These are usually loaded with tangler warheads but a range of munitions are carried.

4. **Army Special Forces, 22nd SAS Regiment:** 12 soldiers, in military Air Cars, p. TS193, an elite mix of humans, bioroids and bioshells running SAIs and ghosts, with battle rifles, p. TS155, and ground combat variant Centurion battlesuits, p. TS160. 4 Combat Nagas, P. TS124, with 10mm PDWs. These are typically used for reconnaissance before a battlesuit assault.

Note that if it gets to this level then the PCs are probably doomed. UK Special Forces do not make arrests and have absolutely no tradition of taking prisoners.

The Ritz

The Ritz Hotel has maintained its status as a luxury establishment and it is a large and busy building with hundreds of guests and staff, the latter a mix of biosapients front of house and cybershells behind the scenes. It maintains both a physical desk and concierge service and a VR lobby. There is a discreet use of AR within the hotel.

For security, there is NAI surveillance in all of the public areas and the plainclothes hotel security team has four biosapients on duty at any one time. They are armed with electrolaser pistols but they are very reluctant to draw them in public.

The Xox

Dr. Jinjiri is a research scientist, and has few skills that are relevant to the Xox's current plight. However, he is also very intelligent and his Xox has all of his attributes. Escaping was not easy and the Xox is well aware that staying free may pose even more of a challenge. It has some hope that the use of the concealed bank account may have masked its trail, but it has also made other arrangements.

The Xox is in its top floor suite at the Ritz. One Peregrine Protection operative is in the suite with it at all times. Another lurks in the hallway and elevator area on the same floor and another is in the hotel's main lobby. The Peregrine personnel have electrolaser pistols, light nanoweave vests and radio intercommunication. They are close protection specialists, with good pistol and unarmed skills, but they are not fanatics. The terms of their contract with the Xox are that the police are not to be called except as a last resort.

Cooking Tips

Covert Action

The team has to come up with a plan to grab the Xox and get it to the safe house without initiating a police response. There are a number of ways to do this but any approach will probably contain the following elements:

- Confirm the visual appearance of the cyberdoll -- this was obtained from a rental agency that operates out of a VR storefront. Matching the price paid from the transaction history to their pricelist suggests that a standard appearance model was hired. This may lead to the possibility of mistaken identity in any relatively crowded location.
- Determine which room the Xox has in the hotel -- the two approaches to this are probably either to bribe a member of staff or to attempt computer intrusion as in p. FW128. For bribery relevant skills, Acting, Fast Talk etc., should be used. In 2100 human hotel workers are generally better paid than in the early 21st century so a reasonable sum may be required. For intrusion, the hotel system has an NAI with Computer Operation-15.
- Subvert the hotel surveillance system -- as above except that bribery is a much tougher proposition. There are also the additional approaches of physically interrupting camera feeds, power or even the hotel microframe.
- Defeat the Xox's Peregrine bodyguards -- traditional methods will probably be used here, the problem is to do it without alerting the hotel security or having a call made to the police. A large-scale distraction, such as a fire alarm, is a possibility but will probably only be effective if the hotel NAI or the surveillance system has been subverted in some way.
- Getaway -- A ground or air car can be hired at \$150 a day via VR. It is a short drive to Maddox Street.

If it is confronted by the team, the Xox will run rather than fight, since Dr. Jinjiri has no combat skills to speak of. As it is in a tough cyberdoll body, the Xox is quite prepared to take physical risks in order to escape e.g. jumping through windows, climbing down drainpipes etc. If cornered, it will try and tell the team why it really fled from the asteroid base and plead with them for help. At this point the PCs may be in too much of a hurry to listen, however.

If the team sweep the Cyberdoll for surveillance devices then they will find a tracer nanobug concealed in its clothing by Peregrine. If they don't then they will be quickly followed.

Once at Maddox Street, the EDI specialist will hook the cyberdoll up to a microframe and get to work. If the tracer has not been dealt with then a 4 biosapient Peregrine reaction team will interrupt proceedings. They are armed with electrolaser rifles, tear gas grenades, p. B152, and wear heavy nanoweave vests and gas masks. Their plan is a stealthy approach followed by a quick assault to recover the Xox.

Extra Spice

After two hours of hacking, the EDI specialist engages in a lengthy VR call and the team is then given further instructions. It seems that the Xox used the cash to make a backup copy of itself at the transfer station and then had the teradisks shipped to another location in London. It is imperative that these be recovered as well. The specialist has the location, but sensible PCs will probably want to directly interrogate the Xox. If they do then the Xox will certainly tell them what is really going on.

At this point the GM can decide from one of two explanations depending on which is most appropriate to his players and any ongoing campaign:

If the team tends towards the transhumanist point of view -- the Xox is from Exogenesis Station, p. DB17. The station has been sold to Nanodynamics, a large transnational, but a conflict has developed with many of the transhuman station staff that is escalating dangerously. EDI are providing security for the Nanodynamics "transition team" and the Xox alleges that in the course of their operations EDI personnel have forcibly edited Dr. Jinjiri. If true, then this is an extremely serious crime as Jinjiri is a citizen, not anyone's property. In this case the teradisks have been sent to Nigel Brotherwick, a very wealthy ghost and transhumanist. Nigel is also an old friend of Dr. Jinjiri and has many contacts within the transhumanist movement.

If the team tends towards the biochauvinist point of view -- the Xox is from Wolf Station, p. DB23. This station has been the subject of a catastrophic accident, which has killed most of the personnel there. Nanodynamics have covered it up by an elaborate deception where most of the staff have been converted to shadows and placed in a VR simulation of their own workplace. The idea is that they will gradually be managed out through natural "deaths" or otherwise cutting off contacts with friends and family. EDI are providing some security for the operation, though in this case they are not immediately implicated in any criminal acts. The Xox says that Dr. Jinjiri is dead and that it is a copy of his shadow. Even while in an effective VR prison, Jinjiri worked out what had happened and engineered the copy of himself as a way of alerting the outside world. In this case the teradisks have been sent to Nathan Rice, a wealthy and well-connected US citizen living in London who has recently retired from "government service." His daughter also died at Wolf and is a shadow there. He recently had a call from her in which she told him that she never wanted to see him again.

In either situation the teradisks are at a house in St. James's Street (see usable map [here](#)).

This is a three-story terraced townhouse with a SAI security system. There are two highly skilled LAI cyberdoll guards armed with electrolasers on duty. St. James's Palace is close by just to add a complication.

It's up to the team to decide what to do.

They can finish the mission for EDI: unless they were very quick in capturing the Xox then the teradisks will have been loaded at the St. James location and Nigel/Nathan will have been briefed by the Xox's backup. He and his AIs will be alert for trouble and they will not hesitate to call the police. A successful covert action under these circumstances is not impossible, but it would be an impressive achievement.

Or they can cut their losses and EDI will pull them out, while frantically trying to formulate some alternate strategy. The team will be paid, but there is the possibility that they now know too much for Nanodynamics' liking.

Or they can side with the Xox, either overtly or by covering its tracks. It will consent to deletion if that is deemed necessary. There is also the complication of the technical specialist at Maddox Street, who is a loyal EDI employee.

If they have sided with the Xox then the team has the option of contacting Nigel/Nathan. In either incarnation he has reacted very badly to the Xox's news and is determined that Nanodynamics will pay. He will consider engaging the PCs to help him and makes an excellent patron. Nanodynamics and EDI make dangerous enemies, however.

Tool Mites

by Eric Funk

The microorganisms known as "Tool Mites" (a.k.a. "Tool Grubs") are a (mostly) symbiotic colony that bond to non-animal materials and cause a euphoric response after prolonged contact with living things. (See "What is it?" below, for some ideas.) Any solid, mostly homogenous non-organic solid could become infected. A common side effect of the euphoria is an increased sense of confidence -- an apprentice believes that he can create masterpieces.

The microbes survive by consuming dust, mites, and other organisms of like scale -- the coating they leave actually seems to attract them. They also consume oxides and prevent further oxidation. Close inspection (Vision-2 or handling object for one to two minutes and successful Touch roll) will reveal its presence, although not without some risk.

Each colony consists of up to one square foot of area and can infect a different material each week, but never the same type as what it's on now (speculation suggests it is a case of "survival by diversification.") Thus a bad apple does not necessarily spoil the bunch here: an infected ball bearing in a plastic cup full of such bearings can eventually affect the cup, which, in turn, can eventually affect part of the wooden table and any other bearings directly touching the cup, but that is the end of it. It's a random mutation each week, so if the same material is rolled, it is *dormant* instead! For larger objects, it requires separate infection events contacting unaffected areas to cover them (minimum of one square inch).

Roll 1d at the beginning of each week:

1d -- Matter Affected

- 1 Plastics
- 2 Dead Plant Matter (e.g. Wood, Paper, Rubber)
- 3 Ferrous Metals
- 4 Heavy/Precious metals (e.g. Lead, Gold, Platinum)
- 5 Other Metals
- 6 Crystals (Jewels, Salt Blocks, Quartz, Glass)

If the rolled material is the same as what it is currently on, it means the colony is "dormant" and it resists attempts to remove it at +2 for every week it is rolled (and +2 to magic resistance, if applicable.) (For exmaple, three weeks in a row = +6). The items are not contagious in any way in the first week of infection (either to humans or to other items). Infected objects are at +1 DR, and +1 Malf to resist bad environment (see p. B485, CII 6).

Effects on Humans

At the end of each day, total the number of whole minutes that a person was in contact with an infected item (round each contact down, minimum 0). Take the sum of the minutes and compare them to a range in yards on the [Speed/Range table](#) and take the associated ToHit/Size modifier. Now roll 3d, and if that number or less is rolled, then the person has received a Dose. (e.g. They feel the euphoric effect. See "Stages" below to check for addiction.) For quick reference, "3 or less" is 7 minutes, "10 or less" is 100 minutes, and "16 or less" for contact over 16 hours.

Example 1: Someone picked up an infected hammer twice for 40 seconds each, and then once for 3.5 minutes. 0+0+3 = 3. Three yards means 0 (no chance).

Example 2: Another worker is exposed for 30 minutes, which translates into 30 yards. This means that the victim receives a Dose on a roll of 7 or less on 3d.

Stages

- 4: "Totally Addicted" (related -10 in disadvantages)
- 3: "Highly Addicted" (related -5 in disadvantages)
- 2: "Addicted" (related quirk on withdrawal attempts)
- 1: Not Addicted

The HT rolls to resist the dose start with a +10 bonus on the first day of rolling. Each subsequent day that one must roll adds a -1 penalty to the roll (if within 30 days of the previous roll), as modified by Fit, Resistance to Poison, and so on. A failed roll means moving up one level, and the cycle begins again. A critical failure means the victim starts the next cycle at +5 instead of +10. A critical success means no more rolls are required for HT days (the countdown is frozen as well). Once "Totally Addicted" is reached (after about 1 month for HT 10 beings), no further rolls are needed.

An Example Vector

A random piece of infected metal,
to a varnish cloth lying on it,
to a ferrous anvil,
to a nonferrous hammer left resting upon it,
to its wooden handle,
to its wielder. . .
suddenly the smith can't stop. . .

Stopping the Spread

It cannot spread to inert animal matter, such as bone, cooking grease, ivory, leather, silk, wax, or wool. It also cannot affect extremely heterogeneous compounds such as mixed stone, dirt, concrete, or raw sand. Thus the simplest way to avoid the effect is to wear gloves made of silk, leather, or wool. The colony can be temporarily rendered inert by subjecting it to an ambient temperature below freezing (or pouring salty ice water over it, since salt water has a lower freezing temperature). To eliminate an entire colony, it must be bathed in boiling water, subjected to great cold (less than -40 degrees for a few minutes), or exposed to approximately 10,000 Volts. Each colony (1 sf) resists spells and cures with HP 2, HT 12 (and 12 FP to resist heat and fire). An extreme may be binding rituals from books such as [*Necronomicon ex Mortis*](#).

Identification

Once the microbes are located, an odd frequency of light can cause it to luminesce. This may require new lamps, or filters to affix to existing ones. Once it can be spotted easily, it is another matter to discern its vector. Technobabble as to why it does not affect animal matter may be the lack of cellulose (or presence of mitochondria) in animal cells, or even pacts with spirits. In the long term, infected areas can be identified due to the lack of dust on them and the surrounding area.

No, What Is It, Really?

Bacteria? Fungus? Mold? Nanites? Plankton? Slime? Tiny spirits? It is whatever the GM needs it to be (or not be, as the case may be). It could be a mutant fungus/mold, or an artificial life form. Its purpose could be:

- A plot to lower the Will of the people by the Illuminati, aliens, or by the government or a corporation just to get people to work hard and enjoy it.
- A mad scientist's work, intended as a self-replicating preserving agent that went wild, perhaps when a single

piece of paper flew out the window.

- Intelligence. It is trying to reach a certain size so that it can gain sapience. Perhaps every time the number of colonies in an area increases by 10 it gains a **GURPS** IQ point.
- Change. The reason it only spreads to *different* adjacent materials may be because it is somehow *evolving* . . .
- Memory Mold -- What if the colony remembers fingerprints or images it is exposed to? It could be kept around as a controlled criminology tool, one that is easily leaked to the outside world . . . It could have begun as a simple, free way to make sticky notes where you need them.

How to Integrate with Existing Campaigns

Do the PCs know anyone who has a "lucky" plastic ball cap, hard-hat, watch, ring, pen, or polyester shirt? Do they seem cranky or distracted without it? Do these people feel more comfortable when behind the wheel of a favorite vehicle, using a certain computer's mouse, a cell phone, carrying a plastic coffee mug, or working on a certain physical file?

Start by describing to the PCs how:

- Someone took their lucky hammer/gun/tool/pin/con badge.
- They just don't do as well without it.
- People are getting jealous and cannot use another tool . . . they are also showing symptoms of Workaholic.

Adventure Seeds

Fights begin to erupt between workers in a shop (garage, clothing), over "favorite" tools. Adventurers must discover the vector, stop it, and prevent unscrupulous corporations and/or government entities from getting a hold of it or covering it up. Scope: It can be from dealing with the local factory or sheriff to having to thwart a megacorp or the equivalent to the FBI.

Scientists could be researching *what* it is. Leaders start tool use rotation and/or enforce the wearing of leather gloves? (The fashion repercussions alone may last generations.)

A factory has released a product (such as a toy or cell phone) infected with the Mites.

While investigating an different virus, perhaps with very visual side effects, they discover it is an attempted "cure" for the effects of the "Tool Mites" . . .

The tool mites contin a message. Written into the introns is a call for help, warning, or other message. The effect on the carrier is meant to ensure that the message will be found . . .

It could have been intended as a harvestable resource, perhaps as a generic food additive. Alternatively, someone discovered how to refine it into a drug that is Totally Addictive with just one dose. The effects of one dose last for 2d × (20-HT minutes, minimum 1). (Average human duration: 70 minutes.) It may be discovered that heavily diluted doses may be a way to ease victims off the physical addiction.

A practical use of these are to coat items for preservation [for the future](#). Books could be "ritually cleansed" by priests with a metal item, lasting for thousands of years . . .

Variants

- On non-humans, the GM must decide how it will affect aliens or people with Unusual Biochemistry. A few suggestions include Bad Temper, Maniac-Depressive, On the Edge, and/or Overconfidence. It will also change a few long-term plans if it not only affects sapient beings, but gnawing pests, too . . .
- Replace the "crystal" entry with "dead organic." This means that standard prevention techniques will not work.

Tools will have to be sterilized daily until laboratory quartz utensils become commonplace.

- Each source type (ferrous, plastic, and so on), is a *separate* addiction.
- The effect on humans is a biological one, and not chemical. That means it is resisted by Resistance to Disease, and also requires a check for Natural Immunity as per **GURPS Basic Set** page 443 (p. B133 in *Third Edition*).
- For an ***In Nomine*** campaign, it might function as Memory Mold, above, but it can differentiate between "mortals" and "non-mortals." Is it the work of a servant of Technology to make it so people can't put the tech toys down? Was it created by Factions to drive divisions between people? (Or as Mad Scientist, above, for either Technology or Lightning?) This variant could also work in ***Mage: The Ascension***.

Pyramid Links

- ["The Ecstasy Virus"](#) by Steve Dickie
- ["Dose of Medicine"](#) by Eric Funk for alternate addiction relief rules

Appendix Z

Welcome to the Neighborhood

by Daniel Bronson

When you live in the big city you rarely live in a vacuum . . . unless your walls, ceiling, and floor are thicker than most. Even if you choose to avoid your neighbors, their existence can certainly affect the personality of your living environment. To use the table roll 2d6, with one as the first digit and the other as the second. Incorporate the description to add flavor to any apartment complex or tenement building, be it where a party member resides or a setting in an adventure.

1. Sights

1. Daily newspaper (in front of the door)
2. Decorations, holiday
3. Door is ajar
4. Doormat, excessively dirty
5. Garden gnome
6. Noise ordinance violation notice stuck to wall or window

2. Sights II

1. Note stuck to door
2. Phonebook, new (in front of the door)
3. Plants, potted
4. Poster, lost pet
5. Poster, political
6. Shoes (in front of the door)

3. Smells

1. Dirt, fresh
2. Garbage, rotting
3. Meat, grilling
4. Mold
5. Plants
6. Popcorn, burning

4. Smells II

1. Smoke, cigarette
2. Smoke, incense
3. Smoke, marijuana
4. Smoke, wood
5. Smoke, other
6. Something unidentifiable

5. Sounds

1. Alarm clock, unattended
2. Child, crying
3. Construction, major or minor
4. Dog, large or small
5. Party
6. Radio

6. Sounds II

1. Romance
2. Shouting, unintelligible
3. Smoke alarm
4. Television
5. Tuba practice
6. Water, running

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Pyramid Review

Seven Civilizations (for *d20 System*)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Rick Neal & Keith Baker

Art & Graphic Design by J. Scott Reeves

96-page perfect-bound black and white book; \$19.95

The arrival of a title from Penumbra, Atlas Games' *d20 System* is always a welcome one. They are invariably thoughtful, intelligent, and useful, as well as restrained in tone and layout. Which is what this latest supplement, an addition to the "**Seven . . .**" series, exactly is. Previous entries have tackled in turn subjects as diverse as [Seven Cities](#), [Seven Strongholds](#), and *Seven Serpents*, but with *Seven Civilizations*, the subject is fantasy cultures.

Seven Civilizations aims to present seven distinct and interesting cultures and societies, each easily slotted into almost any fantasy campaign with little fuss or indeed impact upon the world around them. This it does in the usual well-organized and easy-to-use fashion expected of a Penumbra title. Each section in turn gives an overview of the civilization, placement suggestions where it could be located, its history, notable locations and personalities, how to play a character from said civilization, and two or three adventure seeds. Interspersed between this is Scott Reeves' cartography and illustrations, all pleasingly and fittingly executed. Backing all of this information up is an index that is actually split into indices that in turn list the communities, feats, magic items and spells, personalities, and miscellaneous entries to be found throughout *Seven Civilizations*.

The first of these seven is the Dragon Kings. Descended from 30 sorcerers, who mixed their blood with that of dragons, the Dragon Kings once ruled a mighty empire. Since the empire's fall long ago, the ruling families have found homes in many other nations, usually in positions of responsibility and power, but not necessarily ruling ones. Insular, decadent, and jaded by nature, the remainder of the 30 families are chiefly concerned with familial status and genealogy, and locating members of the lost families. Conflict arises as families and lineages jockey for status, fanatics strive to purify bloodlines, and the young chafe under the strict restrictions imposed by the elders of the Noble and Royal bloodlines.

The Dragon Kings are easy to insert into a setting, being found in any civilized nation. As characters they are natural sorcerers, charismatic, and often marked with draconian traits: scales, ridges, horns, and so on. As a civilization, they are very political, almost akin to the Camarilla of *Vampire: the Masquerade* fame.

For those that like tales and legends of a paradise on the prime material plane, Takalas is perfect. It is literally a land of milk and honey, as well as of awakened trees, musical blooms, rainbow rivers, woodland species that engage you in conversation, and other wonders. But it is unlikely that the player characters will ever find it, though they might encounter its inhabitants and caretakers. These are bands of traveling Gnomes, with reputations as excellent alchemists and craftsmen, who in turn spend a single season in Takalas each year. Divided into four seasonal clans (Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter) the remainder of the year is spent traveling, trading, and working for the items that will help the upkeep of Takalas. During these travels, home is a magical wagon, which seems just large enough for the two Gnomes riding upfront, but being larger on the inside is home to as many as 50! Although the Takalas Gnomes are no different to those of the *Player's Handbook*, several feats are included to reflect the clans' specialities. The Takalas are a culture to be encountered and traded with periodically, but players investigating further might discover hints of a dark secret hidden behind the differing natures of the four clans.

The Wind Riders are similarly nomadic, but far rougher and not as civilized. Instead of horses, they ride large birds called Kylorns, while flightless counterparts called Belorns are raised for their meat and eggs. They have a strong oral and song tradition and regulate conflict through raids and counting coup. Wind Riders also like to trade and barter, so they like to meet outsiders, but they will harass merchant caravans traveling through Wind Rider territory.

Silvergate is a more diverse society, a city between the planes, once used as an inescapable prison accessible only via the *Mirrorwalk* spell. This is the province of the Guild of Gatekeepers, which will charge for passage but also keep the traveler out of the hands of the Glass Jackals, who like to gate travelers into the city and then rob them. As a species the Gatians, as they are known, are charming and used to dealing with strangers. They are a *mélange* race, interbred from Silvergate's human, elf, gnome, dwarf, halfling, and orc inhabitants. The city is a possible quick method of travel between planes and worlds, a possible refuge for a villain, and its shadow markets are a potential source of esoteric items.

Where the Wind Riders adapt the idea of horse tribes to the air, the Wilding Tribes takes the concept of tribal totem one step further. They are a large confederation of barbarians that hold various animals all-important: wolves, boars, bears, rats, tigers, and others. Each tribe's leading warriors and shaman have gained their totem's favor and can manifest an animal form of it. In other words, they are lycanthropes! Conflict arises because the tribes infect outsiders to claim as their own, because they face proselytizing priests and paladins, and because merchants have established trade forts through their territory. The Wilding Tribes might be encountered having infected a party member and wanting to adopt him, or even while guarding an interested amateur anthropologist.

The most civilized of cultures in ***Seven Civilizations*** is the Mondian Empire. This is a rich, dynamic and stable nation that has absorbed several countries around it, through both force and psionic means. It is driven by a philosophy of merit, all children being tested and given the opportunity to enter imperial service in positions appropriate to their test results. Although an interesting enough read, the Mondian Empire is probably the most difficult to use because it is the most stable. The last of the seven in this book is the Kel Tuera and thankfully possesses more potential for mayhem and miscellany. Kel Tuera is a long forgotten mighty empire, remembered only by the odd sage or two. Outside of the little information known about Kel Tuera, the only surviving artifacts are its orbs. The empire revered its heroes so that when they died, their spirits were preserved in indestructible gemstones or orbs. Kept in this way a spirit was able to pass on his knowledge, experience, and wisdom, but all were denied interaction with the living through the magic of one of Kel Tuera's enemies. Without the guidance of its heroes, the empire fell and the orbs were scattered. Recently though the orbs have awoken and have begun finding hosts, the aim being to rebuild Kel Tuera once again. While an orb offers various abilities and has the best of intentions, any new orb-bearer is slowly taken over by the orb's personality and loses levels in his own class as he gains levels in the orbs. At the same time the bearer's personality might radically change. Should this happen to a player character, notes are included on how to remove an orb.

Seven Civilizations is everything you would expect of a Penumbra title. It is solidly written, with contents that are both interesting to read and easy to slip into almost any campaign, though *not* quite. None of the entries here can be *just* dropped in and benefit more from being worked into a campaign, while others suffer from being not quite interesting enough. But to be fair, this is just picking nits, and for the fantasy gamer looking for more than the slash, bang, wallop, grab the loot nonsense, ***Seven Civilizations*** is another good book from Atlas Games.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Clocktowers

Published by [Jolly Roger Games](#)

Designed by Alan R. Moore & Aaron Weissblum

Art by Jacob Elijah Walker

66 full-color cards, rules, two to four players, \$12

Given the state of the world today, you could be forgiven for thinking *Clocktowers* was a game about something else. Rest assured the Jolly Roger Games product is a simple, family friendly card game.

The object of the game is to build the most valuable structures in the city, scoring the most points.

The deck is really three smaller decks: Stories, Clocks, and Roofs. Everyone starts out with an identical hand of three cards, removed before everything else gets shuffled. The three decks are left face-up. Yes, this means everyone can see the next card to be drawn from each stack. Starting with the oldest player, everyone starts building.

On your turn, you play a card, then draw a card. You may discard one instead, but regardless you have to eliminate something from your hand. All towers start with at least one Story card (a single card may picture one or two levels). You can add as many floors as you like, but it won't be complete unless you have a Clock; once that's in place you can't play any more Stories. From there all you can do is finish with a Roof.

You may have as many towers under construction as you like (or feel you can manage), but you have to outdo your opponents in the same color suit (indicated by the color of the Roof) by going one better. If someone finishes a three-story Yellow Clocktower, for example, the next person to finish a Yellow Clocktower must make it four Stories -- no more, no less. Some Stories and Clocks also have Cats and Mice living in them, and these pictures will reduce the value of your buildings.

When everyone runs out of cards or, more likely, no longer has any plays to make, it's time to tally the scores. A critter-free tower is worth the most, and having Cats is less odious than Mice. Towers you couldn't finish are worth nothing.

It's colored by some pleasant art, especially given how hard it must be to make clock faces, rooftops, and building facades look different or exciting. Sadly, some of the animals are almost hidden in the illustrations -- a pale Mouse next to a pastel wall, for example -- and the Blue and Gray Roofs share similar hues even if you aren't colorblind. There are also some Story cards that have a completed level with a half-started floor being built atop that. It seems pretty clear after some reflection that these are one-Story cards, and the artist should be forgiven for wanting to break up some of the monotony of the fairly featureless structures, but some of them fall at the halfway mark and it's a distraction.

Considering how easy it seems to be to make an honest mistake when playing, there should have been a couple of lines about what to do if someone is caught doing something they didn't mean to. Most of it would probably boil down to "Don't count that Clocktower," but there was room on the sheet for some sort of mulligan advice. For only 66 cards, this game takes up a whole lot of table space -- those towers rise high and fast, and spread to either side in short order.

But on the plus side, it's a good game (even if it does go a little wacky with the capitalization). It gives you quite a bit

to think about, but it's simple and clever and not easily mastered. Getting a tower up without infestation by vermin seems like an impossible task, and yet it happens (the trick is making it happen deliberately). With all the draw decks face-up, you not only have to account for what your opponents might do, you must plan for what the next player will be able to do. Do you take that Blue Roof? You know you need it to complete your (much-higher) Blue Clocktower, but there might be a Red Roof under it, and you can see from his layout your successor could use it. And even then, that two-Story card will be invaluable getting some altitude into your structure -- which to take?

And it's fast. You won't be able to play it anywhere you like, given the space restrictions, but if you have a quarter-hour you probably have the break you need to finish a round. Get enough practice under your belt (or maybe a chess timer), and you might be able to get more than that in there.

Clocktowers is a wonderful little surprise that fits easily into your budget and your timetable.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Super-Tweak

Item: In perusing the web, I've learned that it's possible to play the old LucasArts adventure games on my Playstation Portable. The idea of getting to enjoy *Day of the Tentacle* or *Sam & Max* in the minutes before going to bed is sorely tempting. On the other hand, the idea of Sony's jackbooted thugs kicking down my door and making sure I'm only playing official Sony-profiting games gives me some pause.

Item: Familial plans for the winter holiday have already begun brewing, with the complication that one side is unable to fly this year, and wants people to visit them in Dallas, Texas. Since this is a 22-hour driving trip for all other clusters of the family (or a \$350-or-more-per-person airline ticket -- see next Item), I've proposed an alternative solution, where all parties drive to another family member's place who happens to be near-equidistant from us all, resulting in a 12-hour drive for everyone.

Item: Speaking of flying into Dallas, Texas, in battling the conundrum from Point #2 above, I learned that there is no cheap option for doing so, because the Dallas-Fort Worth airport is apparently ruled by Emperor Palpatine. In a brief flurry of hope, I learned there was another airport I could fly into in Dallas -- the Dallas Love Field -- but discovered that, due to a crazy law, no one is actually able to fly into this airport unless they're flying from Texas or a state adjacent to Texas. (More information is available [online](#), for those curious.) I hope someone is getting pleasantly plump off this arrangement, because I can smell the bacony stench of pork-barrel politics even from here.

In another burst of imagination, I'd hit upon another idea: Maybe I could arrange a flight for somewhere *past* Dallas, and the Dallas Love Field would happen to be a transfer point; then I'd "forget" to make my connection, and just get off there. (Sure, this idea had all kinds of problems -- such as "how the heck do I get luggage?" -- but I at least wanted to know if it was an option.) Unfortunately, although Dallas Love seems to be a fairly busy airport, none of my posited destinations resulted in a stop at that airport.

What do these items have in common?

No, really . . . pipe up if you have any ideas.

Oh, right. Dumb stupid IM-like communication method doesn't actually let you reply until I finish the column. <sigh>

Anyway, the best answer I've got is that they all involve the idea of "tweaking" -- trying to work a device or system differently from how folks assume it was meant to be used. I suspect that gamers are habitual tweakers, either on a micro level (coming up with house rules or minor revisions) or on a more grandiose scale (such as converting games from one genre to another). Really, in thinking about it, I'm not sure if I've ever heard of anyone playing an RPG exactly as it was written (except maybe the really basic "on a roll of 6 it snows and you die" RPG), and even non-roleplaying games end up having lots of variants, new rules, and options created by the players.

As an example separate from the items above, I'd considered trying to start a *Fading Suns* game recently. However, I didn't want to use their house system, nor did I want to use the perfectly valid and thought-out alternative they provided of the *d20 System* version of the game. No, I didn't even want to use the Storyteller system conversion that I'd sorted out a few years ago. Instead, I wanted to use a *different* system.

As another example, we were playtesting my new card game at a family function last weekend, and someone came up with an idea. In this game, all players are given one card at the beginning, which has an effect on the game. Why, someone asked, couldn't all players be given two or three cards each, and players choose the one card of those they want (putting the other two in their hands)? This seemed like a simple enough proposition, but it allows for more customization and play variance. While I don't think it's going to make it into the final version of the game, at the very least it will be included as a variant.

In looking over various game-related websites, I suspect that a majority of all RPG sites out there (or at least the unofficial fan-related sites) are devoted to tweaking: adding settings not supported by a rule set, detailed lists of house

rules, converting one game to another, character creation options, and the like. This stands in sharp contrast to many other hobbies out there; while I'm sure there are hints for the sewing community on how to convert, say, a sewing machine into a pattern embroider, the bulk of all sewing sites out there are devoted to telling people how to use their sewing machines exactly as it was meant to be used. Likewise the majority of all baseball sites are devoted to talking about baseball the way it was meant to be played (and the players who play it), not for strange variations or means of doing things in baseball that weren't originally conceived.

While I'm sure these tweaking tendencies cause no end of consternation for the game publishers -- since it's harder to sell, say, a portable version of ***Sam & Max*** when people have already tweaked how to play it on their own -- in the end I think it's probably good for the industry, since it encourages us to keep getting knee-deep in games long after others would relegate them to the closet. Of course, sometimes that process is more fun than the game itself; why use any old wheel when you can reinvent the spoke?

--*Steven Marsh*

Men in Gray

for GURPS

by Stephen Dedman

"Make it 10. I'm only a poor corrupt official."

--Louis Renault, *Casablanca*

"Here's to the pencil-pushers: may they all get lead poisoning."

--Eddie Valiant, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*

Bureaucrats have been with us at least since Himuralibima began carving records into clay tablets, and will probably still be keeping someone on hold when eternity ends. Their powers may be limited, but within those limits, they may be as dictatorial as the most fearsome tyrant and just as dangerous to cross. And in any society larger than a clan and better organized than total anarchy, PCs are bound to encounter someone who can expedite or delay a vital transaction -- be it a library card for IOU, a map of the cemetery showing the most recent graves, the key to the locker that holds the Maltese Falcon, an end user certificate, or a stay of execution for the posse.

With that in mind, here is a collection of administrator NPCs designed for use as contacts, enemies, allies, dependents, hirelings, Illuminati, and their dupes. All are designed with a particular worldbook in mind, but require only minor changes to adapt for almost any setting from the dawn of literacy to the largest galactic empire.

Occupational Template: Bureaucrat (25 points)

This is a competent mid-level administrator in a government, large business, or similar organization -- a man or woman of average point value, in a struggling or average job (unless they're skimming the funds). Characters like this might be found in any setting where positions of minor authority are awarded largely on merit to literate civilians of Status 0 or better (rather than inherited, or restricted to the military or clergy). For example, this template might be used in campaigns set in ancient China (where poetry, as well as calligraphy, would be a requirement), post-Renaissance Europe and its colonies, and most modern societies.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 10 [0]. [10 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Literacy, Rank (administrative)/1 [5], and 20 points chosen from among Absolute Timing [2], Acute Senses [2/level], Contact Group [Varies], Cultural Adaptability [10], Deep Sleeper [1], Eidetic Memory [5], Honest Face [1], Language (Accented) [4], Language Talent [10], Less Sleep [2/level], Lightning Calculator [2], Single-Minded [5], Talent (Business Acumen or Mathematical Ability) [10/level], Wealth (Comfortable) [10], Will [5/level], or +1 to ST or HT.

Disadvantages and Quirks: -20 points chosen from among Alcoholism [-15], Attentive [-1], Bad Temper [-10*], Bully [-10*], Callous [-5], Charitable [-15*], Chummy [-5 or -10], Clueless [-10], Code of Honor [varies], Combat Paralysis [-15], Cowardice [-10*], Debt [-1 point/level], Dependents [varies], Dreamer [-1], Greed [-15*], Hard of Hearing [-10], Hidebound [-5], Honesty [-10*], Intolerance [varies], Laziness [-10], Lecherousness [-15*], Low Self-Image [-10], Mundane Background [-10], Oblivious [-5], Paranoia [-10], Selfish [-5*], Sense of Duty [varies], Staid [-1], Stubbornness [-5], Uncongenial [-1], Unfit [-5 or -15 points], Wealth (Struggling) [-10], Weirdness Magnet [-15], or Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills: Administration (A) IQ+2 [8]-13.

Secondary Skills: Scrounging (E) IQ+1 [2]-12. Select one skill from Artist (Calligraphy) (H) IQ-1 [2]-10, Computer Operation/TL (E) IQ+1 [2]-12, or Typing (E) IQ+1 [2]-12. Select two skills from: Accounting (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Current Affairs/TL (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Merchant (A) IQ [2]-11; Research/TL (A) IQ [2]-11; Speed-Reading (A) IQ [2]-11; Writing (A) IQ [2]-11.

Background Skills: Area Knowledge (E) IQ [1]-11, Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-11, and select two skills from: Carousing (E) HT [1]-10; Driving/TL (A) DX-1 [1]-9; Fast-Talk (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; First Aid/TL (E) IQ [1]-11; Hobby Skill (E) IQ [1]-11 or DX [1]-10; Intimidation (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Law (H) IQ-2 [1]-9, or Poetry (A) IQ-1 [1]-10.

Lenses

Cleric: (+8 points) A bureaucrat in a theocracy, or a culture where literacy comes exclusively from a religious education. Add Clerical Investment [+5 points], replace Rank/1 (Administrative) with Rank/1 (Religious): add Religious Ritual (H) IQ-2 [1]-10 and Theology (H) IQ-1 [2]-10.

Military: (+11 points) This character may be a bureaucrat in a military oligarchy, a company clerk, a supply sergeant or paymaster, or even a samurai who keeps records for his daimyo. Replace Rank/1 (Administrative) with Rank/1 (Military) [+5 points]: add Savoir-Faire (Military) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12, Soldier (A) IQ [2]-11, Survival (any) (A) Per-1 [1]-10, and 4 points spent on weapon skills. Select one skill from Crewman (any) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12, and Driving/TL (any) or Riding (any), both (A) DX [2]-10.

Specialist: (+28 points) This character does administrative work within his chosen professional field -- e.g. a head nurse, a lawyer clerking for a judge, etc. Add +1 IQ [20], and select one from Architecture/TL, Merchant, or Teaching, all (A) IQ+2 [8]-13, or Computer Programming/TL, Engineer/TL, Law or Physician/TL, all (H) IQ+1 [8]-12.

Robert Sunderland, Prison Records Clerk (70 points)

Ht 5'7", Wt 130 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 39.

Appearance: Acne-scarred pale complexion, brown eyes, thinning brown hair.

Languages: English (Native). TL: 5. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline.

Attributes: ST 8 [-20]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 9 [-10]. [10 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13; HP 8 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 9 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [5].

Advantages and Perks: Rank (administrative)/1 [5]; Single-Minded [5]; Contact Groups (Business, Effective Skill 15, 9) [10], (Police, Effective Skill 12, 12) [10], (Street, Effective Skill 13, 9) [5]; Honest Face [1]; Less Sleep/2 [4]; Wealth, Comfortable [10].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Bad Sight (Nearsighted; Mitigator, eyeglasses, -60%) [-10], Callous [-5], Careful [-1], Dislikes most animals [-1], Greed (12)[-15], Incompetence (Sex-Appeal) [-1], Nosy [-1], Secretly collects pornography [-1], Unattractive [-5], Workaholic [-5].

Skills: Accounting (H) IQ [4]-12; Administration (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Area Knowledge (County) (E) IQ [2]-13; Current Affairs/TL5 (Regional) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Diplomacy (H) IQ-2 [2]-11; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [4]-13; Guns/TL5 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-11; Interrogation (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Law (U.S., Criminal) (H) IQ-2 [2]-11; Merchant (A) IQ [4]-13; Photography/TL5 (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-12; Scrounging (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Speed-Reading (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Streetwise (A) IQ [4]-12; Teamster (A) IQ-2 [1]-11; Writing (A) IQ-2 [1]-11.

Robert Sunderland is a small and rather rabbit-like looking man whose humble manner, appearance, and position belie the near-absolute power that has steadily corrupted him. In 13 years as the records clerk at the state penitentiary, Sunderland has learned to manipulate the system to provide him with a comfortable income, regular sex, and a network of criminals whose services he can call upon at need.

Most of Sunderland's illegal income comes from cooking the prison's books: he is expert at inflating expenses and hiding the earnings from hiring out the chain gang as laborers. He's careful to give the warden (an alcoholic ex-gunfighter), the guards, the judges, and police a cut of the profits, and can rely on their protection. He also collects bribes from prisoners who want an early release or some extra comforts in their cells, and has turned the women's cell-block into one of the county's most profitable brothels. He will also occasionally blackmail an ex-con into providing information or favors (sexual and otherwise), but for the most part he confines his bullying to the penitentiary's inmates -- particularly attractive women, who he likes to photograph. For prisoners with money or influence, it only takes a little shuffling of the records to reduce felonies to petty misdemeanors -- or to have the wrong man sent to the gallows.

Campaign uses: Any PCs committing any sort of crime inside Sunderland's sphere of influence risk spending time in a cell: just how much time depends on how useful they can be to the clerk. Prisoners who step out of line may never leave the prison, ending their days in unmarked graves.

Other settings: Sunderland is designed for a *Deadlands* or *Old West* campaign, but bribable jailors date back at least to the time of Socrates, and may be encountered in any time and era where accountability is not sufficiently rigorous.

William Lee, Harbormaster's Clerk and Spy (125 points)

Ht 5'10", Wt 160 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 45.

Appearance: Tanned complexion, brown eyes, wavy dark brown hair.

Languages: English (Native), Cantonese (Native) [4], Japanese (Accented) [2], Mandarin (Accented) [2], Russian (Accented) [2]. TL: 6. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline.

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 10 [0]. [90 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 26; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 15 [10]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages and Perks: Alcohol Tolerance [1]; Contact Group (Street, Effective Skill 12, 6) [3], Eidetic Memory [5], Language Talent [10], Rank (administrative)/1 [5].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Attentive [-1], Broad-Minded [-1], Dependents (Large family back in England) [-40], Lameness (crippled leg) [-10], Nosy [-1], Sense of Duty (Country) [-10], Uncongenial [-1].

Skills: Acting (A) IQ [2]-13; Administration (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Area Knowledge (Large nation) (E) IQ [2]-14; Artist (Drawing) (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Carousing (E) HT [1]-10; Cartography (A) IQ-1 [1]-13*; Current Affairs/TL6 (Regional) (E) IQ [1]-13; Detect Lies (H) IQ [4]-13; Diplomacy (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Disguise (A) IQ [2]-13; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-13; First Aid/TL6 (E) IQ [1]-13; Geography/TL6 (Political) (H) IQ+1 [8]-14; Guns/TL6 (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-12, (Rifle) DX+2 [4]-13; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-13; Intelligence Analysis/TL6 (H) IQ+1 [8]-14; Interrogation (A) IQ [2]-13; Intimidation (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Merchant (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Photography/TL5 (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Research/TL6 (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-13; Savoir-Faire (Military) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Scrounging (E) IQ [1]-13; Speed-Reading (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Typing (E) IQ [1]-13; Writing (A) IQ-1 [1]-12.

* Default from Geography -2

Captain William Lee was an experienced soldier, but when his leg was shattered by a rifle bullet, he was discharged from the army and went to the nearest port to wait for a ship to take him back to England. Instead of sailing, he

accepted a position as a shipping clerk with an unpaid sideline as part-time spy.

Locals assume he's a harmless codger with a penchant for drawing and photographing seascapes and landscapes, but he has an encyclopedic knowledge of the movement of cargo through the docks -- particularly anything with military use. He mostly relies on his binoculars and memory, but also has a network of informants, and occasionally disguises himself as a local and snoops around the docks, markets and taverns when other sources of data dry up.

Campaign uses: Lee can come to the PCs' rescue if they get into trouble in his port city, provide useful information on local customs, act as an interpreter, or hire shady but resourceful characters to perform sabotage or assassination to protect British interests.

Other settings: Sunderland is designed for a *Cliffhangers* adventure set in Shanghai or Hong Kong, but can easily be relocated to any hotspot in the era, and many in the modern world or the future.

Leo Dickenson (75 points)

Ht 5'10", Wt 110 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 23.

Skinny, rather geeky looking human male, pale complexion, dark green eyes, shoulder-length black hair usually tied in a ponytail.

Languages: English (Native). TL: 8. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 9 [-10]. [40 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 15 [10]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Contact Group (Fellow clerks, Effective Skill 15, 9 or less, Usually Reliable) [20], Eidetic Memory [10], Honest Face [1], Illuminated [15], Rank (administrative)/1 [5], Wild Talent/1 (Mental only, -20%) [16].

Disadvantages: Attentive [-1], Bad Sight (Nearsighted, wears contact lenses -60%) [-10], Broad-Minded [-1], Curious (6) [-10], Likes Goth fashions and women, but dislikes the music [-1], Imaginative [-1], Incompetence (Merchant) [-1], Skinny [-5], Weirdness Magnet [-15].

Skills: Administration (A) IQ+1 [4]-14, Area Knowledge (Washington D.C.) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14, Cartography (A) IQ-1 [1*]-12, Computer Operation/TL (E) IQ+2 [4]-15, Current Affairs/TL8 (Politics) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14, Diplomacy (H) IQ-2 [1]-11, Driving/TL8 (Motorcycle) (A) DX [1]-9, Expert Skill (Conspiracy Theory) (H) IQ [4]-13, Geography (Political) (H) IQ [4]-13, History (H) IQ-2 [2]-11, Literature (H) IQ-3 [1]-10, Photography/TL8 (A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Professional Skill (Librarian) (A) IQ [2]-13, Research/TL8 (A) IQ [2]-13, Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-13, Scrounging (E) IQ+1 [2]-14, Speed-Reading (A) IQ-1 [1]-12.

* Default from Geography -2

Leo Dickenson was an above-average student who was never able to pick a specialization and stick with it for more than a day. During summer break, he took a vacation job clerking in the Library of Congress, and never returned to college.

His job may seem tedious to some, but Leo has always loved books, and maps, and facts, and has no particular ambition other than being allowed to read as much as he likes on any subject. So far, so boring... except that he knows what many of Washington's most influential thinkers are reading, and what maps they're looking at. His Wild Talent enables him to perform remarkable feats of Computer Hacking, Cryptanalysis, Intelligence Analysis and Psychology, as well as understanding written languages. He uses scraps of mostly unclassified data to form a picture of the web of competing conspiracies that dominate the USA and even the world. He rarely volunteers information unless he's asked the right question, but he knows who killed the Kennedys, and why, and much of what is in Warehouse 23, and where.

He could even draw you a map. Of course, as he readily admits, he can't prove any of it...

Campaign uses: Leo is intended as an Ally in a modern-day Illuminated campaign, an easy way for the GM to give the PCs vital (but incomplete and unconfirmed) information when their own research methods fail. Leo's wild ability to second-guess the details of any plan would also make him a dangerous addition to a group of enemies...

Other settings: Someone like Leo might be found working in a library or records office in any literate culture; figures such as Adam Weishaupt or Cardinal Richelieu would have been very glad to employ him as a clerk, possibly locking him away in a book-lined labyrinth.

Aaron Forrest (70 points)

Ht 5'9", Wt 145 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 26.

Appearance: Brown skin, brown eyes, short black hair, thin mustache.

Languages: English (Native). TL: 9. Cultural Familiarities: Steel (p.B528) Zone Washington.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 10 [0]. [20 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [5]; Per 11 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Contact Group (Protectorate clerks, Effective Skill 15, 9 or less, Usually Reliable) [20], Eidetic Memory [5], Lightning Calculator [2], Rank (administrative)/1 [5], Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Callous [-5], Careful [-1], Chauvinistic [-1], Lecherousness (12) [-15], Likes short women [-1], Proud [-1], Staid [-1], Workaholic [-5].

Skills: Accounting (H) IQ [2]-10; Acting (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Administration (A) IQ+3 [12]-14; Area Knowledge (Zone Washington) (E) IQ [2]-12; Boxing (A) DX [2]-10; Computer Operation/TL9 (E) IQ+2 [4]-13; Current Affairs/TL9 (E) IQ [1]-11; Driving/TL9 (Automobile) (A) DX [2]-10; Electronics Operation/TL9 (Security) (A) IQ [1]-10; Guns/TL9 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-10; Intimidation (A) Will [1]-11; Research/TL (A) IQ [2]-11; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-11; Scrounging (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Sex Appeal (A) HT-1 [1]-9; Speed-Reading (A) IQ [1]-10.

Aaron Forrest is a mid-level clerk in the Washington Protectorate's Department of Transport in the Steel parallel. A fourth-generation office worker, he was trained from early childhood for a lifetime in the bureaucracy, assigned to his job by the Department of Labor's AI, and quickly promoted. He is an efficient worker, but best of all (from the Zonemind's point of view, at least), he is completely untroubled by any sense of compassion. He can issue orders to send people to a slave labor camp or a gas chamber as easily as he can fill out a requisition for truck tires.

Aaron is essentially law-abiding, has little interest in wealth, and will not jeopardize his career by accepting bribes. He does, however, have a weakness of which the Zonemind is unaware: he will go out of his way to help anyone to whom he has an Excellent reaction. Those he favors are always female of attractive or better appearance; Charisma, Voice, and a good roll vs. Sex-Appeal can also help. A woman who actually seduces him, or allows herself to be seduced, will get a further +1 to +3 bonus to later reaction rolls, but Aaron will try to save the life of any woman who he falls for, even if it means never seeing her again. He's unlikely to break the law to help any woman's male friends, but he isn't particularly jealous and won't go far out of his way to have one killed or removed.

Campaign uses: Aaron can be very useful to PCs when in Steel, being able to get them onto a transport to anywhere in Zone Washington or Zone Denver. He can easily provide letters of transit and other papers, as well as schedules for government vehicles that characters can stow away on. He may also be able to give confiscated vehicles or spare parts to the PCs, find out passwords for Protectorate installations, tell them when and on what routes supplies are being shipped to Protectorate forces, or even get prisoners transported out of secure camps in less-secure vehicles that PCs

can then hijack -- though doing something of this magnitude may require bribes or favors for fellow bureaucrats, which PCs may have to assist with.

Other settings: Characters such as Aaron may be encountered in any bureaucracy, and will be common in totalitarian societies where such positions are carefully screened for the right degree of callousness (such as the Reich parallels).

Vondra Glaze (50 points)

Ht 5'4", Wt 105 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 29.

Human female, average looks, pale complexion, hazel eyes, ash-blond hair cut short.

Languages: Anglic (Native). TL: 10. Cultural Familiarity: Sector.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 10 [0]. [10 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 13 [10]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Cultural Adaptability [10], Legal Enforcement Powers [5], Rank (administrative)/2 [10], Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Bully (15) [-5], Careful [-1], Delusions (Believes she has Danger Sense) [-1], Devout Christian [-1], Incompetence (Sex-Appeal) [-1], Intolerance [-10], Paranoia [-10], Stubbornness [-5], Uncongenial [-1].

Skills: Administration (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; Area Knowledge (Sector) (E) IQ [1]-12; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-10; Body Language (A) Per [2]-13; Computer Operation/TL10 (E) IQ+2 [4]-13; Current Affairs/TL10 (Headline News) (E) IQ [2]-12; First Aid/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-11; Freight Handling (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Hazardous Materials/TL10 (Biological) (A) IQ [2]-11, (Chemical, Radioactive, Nanotech) [1 each]-10; Holdout (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Interrogation (A) IQ [2]-11; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-11; Law (Customs and Immigration) (H) IQ-1 [4]-11; Research/TL10 (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-11; Scrounging (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Search (A) Per+1 [4]-14; Smuggling (A) IQ [2]-11; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-11.

Vondra Glaze was five years old when her parents were killed by a terrorist bomb on the monorail they caught every day. She was raised in a series of foster homes, but never completely trusted anyone else again. After finishing her schooling, she applied for a job in the Imperial Bureaucracy. When a vacancy came up at Talos's Class I Starport, a post where she would be working alone except for a few robots, she was the only applicant with enough experience to be considered suitable.

Vondra's lack of social graces doesn't prevent her doing her job as a Customs and Immigration officer with remarkable efficiency -- most of the time. The problems occur when she mistakes her paranoid suspicions about strangers for genuine insight. If she has a bad or worse reaction to a visitor from offworld, she is likely to use all her powers to make sure they're not smuggling drugs or other contraband, planning a terrorist attack, etc. Her powers of search and seizure enable her to confine any visitor to the starport's detention center until the next ship leaves, or to have a ship's cargo searched as thoroughly (and slowly) as she wants before it is discharged. This may be inconvenient and extremely expensive for ship-owners, and many of them decide that Talos is not worth the trouble. If Vondra catches someone who really is trying to smuggle anything through customs (or, worse still, themselves through passport control), she will call the security robots and demand the smuggler's arrest -- which may result in fining, imprisonment, or psycho-surgery. As she has no superiors on the planet, her unfortunate victims can only try to appeal to authorities on the sector capital, several weeks flight away.

Campaign uses: The paranoid and intolerant Vondra will usually have a very bad or worse reaction to at least one PC who passes through her domain and will find an excuse to have them confined, searched, scanned, and interrogated by

the local police. If the other PCs try to help them, they may also be subjected to Vondra's bullying.

Other settings: Someone like Vondra might be encountered in any small port, airport, or border crossing, especially in a repressive society.

Adventure Seeds

Roadkill (*Deadlands*): The PCs hear a rumor that a chain gang from the state penitentiary has disappeared while repairing a road in the desert, along with their guards. When the posse turns up at the prison, the warden is too drunk to see them, and only Sunderland will listen. He's secretly unhappy that people have apparently escaped without paying him, and may consider hiring the posse to replace the guards. If not, the PCs will be arrested shortly after their return to town, and if they don't persuade Sunderland to release them, they'll eventually put on the chain gang themselves and have to deal with whatever ate the previous team.

Chinese Take-Out (*Cliffhangers/Martial Arts*): When Leo Dickenson becomes convinced that he's discovered the location of the treasure-filled tomb of a Manchu emperor, he tries to persuade the PCs to accompany him on an expedition to discover it. When they arrive in Shanghai, though, Dickenson and the PCs are robbed of most of their belongings. William Lee learns where their gear is probably being kept, but warns them that the storeroom is outside the International Settlement and guarded by very dangerous hatchetmen. He tells them they can get some guns from the bodyguards of a visiting warlord: all they have to do is gain their trust and beat them in a dice game, a drinking game, or a no-holds-barred bar brawl. And while they're at it, there's a \$10,000 bounty for the warlord's head, if they can bring it back to the Settlement intact.

Transportation for Life (*Reign of Steel*): Friends of the PCs have been smuggling refugees and contraband into Zone Washington on the Protectorate's robot aircraft -- but they discover, to their horror, that one of them has lost a cell phone which can lead the FBI to the PCs and other resistance members, and it may have been left in an aircraft's cargo bay. The PCs will need to enlist Aaron Forrest's help to locate the aircraft, and to get into the hangar to search for the phone. To complicate matters, Aaron is fixated on a beautiful woman who works in his office -- who is actually a Lilith-model android planted by the FBI to search for a suspected traitor in the Department.

Losing your Appeal (*Space/Traveller*): The PCs come to Talos with a cargo including medical wonder-drugs that also have value on the black market. Vondra Glaze takes an immediate dislike to one of them (Very Bad reaction), but is attracted to another (Good reaction). The PCs have 16 hours to win her over without making her too suspicious. If they can increase her average reaction to 13+, they can sell their cargo the next day; if it's 10-12, they have the choice of leaving the planet without selling the drugs, or waiting a day (and paying any docking fee) and trying again; if it's 7-9, they can leave, or try again with a -1 modifier; if it's 6 or less, Vondra will confiscate their cargo and their ship and have them sent to jail to await trial -- assuming the corrupt records clerk doesn't cause them to disappear into the organ banks and blame it on an administrative error.

A Date With History: June 15, 1904

By Christopher J. Burke

June 15, 1904 started as just another Wednesday morning in New York City. It would end with the worst maritime disaster in the city's history, the deadliest in peacetime in America. More than 1,000 people would die before noon on the *General Slocum* on a cruise to Long Island.

The *General Slocum* tragedy began on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the neighborhood that used to be called Little Germany, home to much of the city's immigrant German population. Each year, St. Mark's Lutheran Church held an outing to celebrate the end of the Sunday school year. On June 15, 1904, more than 1,300 people boarded the *General Slocum* for a day of swimming, games, and food at Locust Grove, Long Island. The exact number is unknown: two young infants may have been counted as one passenger, three children may have been counted as two passengers. What is known is that the passengers were mostly women and children because most of the men of the community were at work.

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary about the boat or the captain. The *General Slocum* had been built in 1891 as a ferry boat and had recently passed inspection. She was 264 feet long with a large paddlewheel on each side, weighed 1,300 tons and could carry 2,500 passengers. Capt. William van Schaick, age 68, was an experienced pilot with an unblemished safety record after having ferried over a million passengers in his career. Likewise, his officers were experienced with excellent credentials.

Around 9:30 a.m., the *General Slocum* cast off from the East Third Street pier and steamed northward up the East River, toward Long Island Sound. Its three decks were filled with women and children enjoying the sights of the river and the cool breeze.

A short time later, disaster struck. A young boy noticed smoke coming from the ship's utility room. A crewman spotted him and chased him away. Apparently, a spark in the room had lit some hay on the floor, which had begun smoldering. Unfortunately, although the ship's officers were well-trained, the same could not be said for her crew, many of whom were more likely to be day laborers. One such laborer, John Coakley, had been on the job for only 17 days. He also had been enjoying his first beer of the morning when he yanked open the door. The sudden influx of oxygen turned a spark into an inferno. The fire spread in minutes.

The boy ran through the ship alerting the passengers to the fire. Captain Van Schaick shooed the boy away from the bridge without listening. The crew didn't inform the captain of the fire until 10 minutes had passed.

A Series of Unfortunate Events

If that had been the only mistake made perhaps most of those on board could have been saved. However, many factors combined with the panic to create a perfect storm of fire and chaos.

Although the ship had recently passed inspection, the boat should have failed on many counts. That the inspector had been bribed to look the other way is the obvious conclusion. At the time, no one had thought much about it. Given the captain's safety record, he might have been complacent about safety at any rate.

The old fire hoses had rotted and couldn't handle the water pressure. When the water was turned on, they burst apart.

The life jackets had long passed their expiration dates. Many crumbled to dust when they were grabbed. Those that were "usable" had the consistency of a bag of concrete. Many parents strapped jackets onto their children and sent them into the water hoping to save them, but drowning them instead.

The lifeboats on board could not be lowered. At some prior time, the constant swaying of the boats caused a problem,

so they were wired into place. People frantically clawed at them to no avail.

Furthermore, even if the boats could be detached, they couldn't be lowered into the East River due to the decision of the captain. Instead of pulling into port on either side of the river, Captain Van Schaick went full speed ahead to North Brother Island with intent to beach the *General Slocum*. At that speed, lowering the boats would have been impossible. The speed fanned the flames, spreading the blaze, which was further accelerated by fresh coat of highly flammable paint.

Many of the passengers saw no choice but to jump into the river. Those that did, did not survive long. The fire occurred just after the ship passed through a notorious area known as Hell Gate where the Harlem River, the East River, and Long Island Sound come together. The water moves with a strong, swift current that could drown a good swimmer. Because the passengers were mostly poor immigrants, they didn't swim recreationally. As a result, they couldn't stay above the surface for very long before the weight of their water-soaked clothing -- wool suits or long woolen skirts -- dragged them down.

Heroes and Villains

Although piers lined both sides of the river, Captain Van Schaick chose not to pull into port out of fear that the fire would spread to the other ships, oil tanks, or lumber yards. However, that didn't stop many ships from setting off after the *General Slocum* to render aid and to pull survivors out of the rough waters. One tug, piloted by Jack Wade, even pulled up alongside the burning vessel, rescuing over 100 passengers. Wade knew his boat and his livelihood were both in danger, fully exposed to the flames, but pressed on anyway.

When the ship beached at North Brother Island, it was nearly completely engulfed in flames, and the portion that wasn't was still 200 feet in the water. Help quickly came from the island's residents: nurses and patients at the island's contagious disease hospital (once home to Typhoid Mary). They caught children that were dropped to them. They swam into the water at risk to their own safety to bring people ashore. They grabbed ladders being used for renovations to reach passengers in the water and on board the ship. All who could be saved were quickly removed from the ship.

However, not everyone who raced into the water had charitable motives, nor did all those that were in a position to lend assistance do so. There were reports of extortionists demanding payment before pulling people out of the water -- and then pushing them back into the water. Scavengers moved among the dead, removing jewelry. In the cases of some of the badly burned victims, this also meant removing the only means relatives might have had of identifying them.

Historical Roleplaying

Although the above events as they unfolded would be enough to drive any PC to scream "Killer GM!," the entire scenario can be transported to any ferry ride, whether in a Victorian-era setting or even (with some modifications) out into deep space, wherever the GM needs a case of everything that can go wrong will. (After all, if these events actually happened this way, the players can't really complain . . . much.)

With so many circumstances that had to line up to cause such a disaster, could anyone predict how changing just one thing could alter the tragic results? Wednesday, June 15, 1904 can be the focal point for a time travel adventure, with the team racing back to make sure events happen just as they are supposed to, with the ship reaching the island and all the survivors reaching safety.

Every child saved represents an entire lineage of future generations. Every piece of jewelry stolen or recovered has some history to it. However, if saving life or property make for too boring an adventure, a rival group of time travelers seeking to prevent the fire could have more significant historical consequences.

Tragedy serves as a catalyst for reform and the *General Slocum* was no exception. The fire caused changes in both safety regulations and the required inspections. If those reforms hadn't taken place, who knows what disaster would have occurred in the intervening years between that fateful date of June 15, 1904 and April 10, 1912, when the *Titanic*

sank, ushering in another set of reforms? Would it have been worse? Would it have involved the privileged, upper class rather than working class immigrants? Many "what ifs" can be played out.

And what about the people? The greatest damage done that day was to the immigrant German community. Many lost entire families, and some widowed men committed suicide in the days afterward. The memories were so painful that many moved away, dispersing themselves among the city's population. Ten years later, public opinion toward the Germans changed dramatically with the dawn of the First World War.

But what might've happened had Coakley not opened that door? What if *Kleindeutschland* had survived and flourished? By the beginning of the 20th century, the families of the original immigrants had already established themselves, many becoming shopkeepers and businessmen. Would it be a stretch to see them becoming active in local politics? How would they have reacted to anti-German sentiments? How would the rest of Manhattan react toward them? Could the nation's largest city have shaped national opinion?

Had the community grown in strength, how could they have affected our entry into World War II? Would German reporters working for the major newspapers have slanted their stories differently? Could they have become spies for Hitler? Would questions about their allegiances have forced them into internment camps in the wilds of New Jersey?

Only that *other* team of time travelers can tell you for sure.

Forgotten History

Today, the incident has largely been forgotten. It's remembered annually at a wreath-laying ceremony that is sparsely attended. The St. Mark's building is still standing, but it has ceased to be an active Lutheran Church. The last two survivors of the *General Slocum* lived to see the 21st century. Catherine Connelly, 12 years old at the time of the disaster, died in 2002 at age 109. Adella Wotherspoon, a baby at the time, died in 2004 age at 100.

Pyramid Pick

Classic Battletech: War of 3039

Published by FanPro LLC

Written by Chris Hartford & Christoffer Trossen

Illustrated by Klaus Scherwinski, Jason Vargas, Kevin McCann, Chris Lewis, & Matt Plog

Maps by Oystein Tvedten

168-page b&w softcover; \$29.99

War of 3039 has been a long-awaited product in the **Classic Battletech** universe; now that it's here, I can honestly say it was worth the wait. As a **Classic Battletech** player of many years, I can honestly say that this was a gap that needed to be filled in the history of the game. Sadly, this fairly pivotal event was relegated to a single chapter in the **20 Year Update** and a few chapters in the novel *Heir of the Dragon*. All in all -- 3039, like many of the Battletech conflicts in the timeline 3030-3050 -- were relegated to obscurity, but with 3039, and the promised books in the Historicals series to come after it, that is no more.

What made this project so daunting was the fact that the work that needed to be done to pull this book together was culled from a variety of sources, and with a lot of **Battletech** canon, at times, the information was quite contradictory. The Fanpro creators, however, rose to the task.

So, what's in the book? One finds a format similar to the **Fedcom Civil War** book, in that each wave is broken down into chapters and each planet gets at least a couple of paragraphs to describe the course of the fighting on world. It also describes the "shadow war" and the reactions of the other powers in the **Battletech** universe. Sidebars and "editors notes" add color to what might have been a bland retelling of the "facts. Also included are rules for Level 2 (or Star League) prototype technology just coming on line in 3039 and seeing field-testing for the first time. Also included are rules for the new **Battletech** strategic game found in the **Combat Operations Handbook** describing how one can re-fight the War of 3039 on the strategic level, a boon to many players, whether or not they actually decide to do so. It also has unit charts so one can roll up simple Battletech scenarios set during the period as well. In short, the uses for the book in scenario development and play are staggering and the book quality is setting a new standard for **Battletech** products. It more than lives up to its promise of "allowing players to replay every laser shot and autocannon blast."

What I liked about *War of 3039* was that it did its job admirably, and coupled with the beautiful maps from Mr. Tvedten, we have a nice product that details a war that for many years, was a historical "blank spot" in the **Battletech** universe. The complaints I have are small; some planetary write-ups like the ones in the back of the Fedcom Civil War sourcebook would have been nice. Another point is that in the annex for the Strategic game, it might have been nice if the writers let people know how they had come to the unit ratings they did. Yes, the rules are in **Combat Operations**, but the actual unit breakdowns might have been nice. Also, some of the art did not match the fiction and in particular, in the section describing the various personalities of the period, Hanse Davion looks nothing like his fictional descriptions, a minor nitpick, to be sure, but noticeable.

Another nitpick is in the material presented on Nondi Steiner; considering what she became later on in the game history, one wonders how she got there from the character she is portrayed as in 3039.

In terms of game enhancement, the product more than accomplishes its mission. It gives the Battletech player a new era to play in. The source material alone is enough to generate thousands of scenarios for the **Combat Operations Strategic Game**, **Classic Battletech**, **Aerotech 2** and the **Classic Battletech RPG**. With the rules for the prototype Level 2 equipment and for creating forces for 3039, it allows players to delve into a period that was barely mentioned by canon before. As a **Classic Battletech** fanatic, it's nice to see this part of **Battletech** history finally get its day in the sun.

Another reason to buy this is because it is the first in a set of "Historicals" series that Fanpro is intending on publishing to fill in the gaps of **Battletech** history; other titles will cover the Andurien Rebellion, the Clan retaking of the Pentagon worlds, and the Star League Liberation of Terra. If **War of 3039** is any clue to the level of detail and effort that is going to go into these books, then I can't wait for the rest.

--Jason Reade Weiser

Pyramid Review

RoboRally

Published by [Avalon Hill](#)

Designed by Richard Garfield

Edited by Darla Kennerud

Art, graphics by Peter Whitley, Peter Bergting, Bob Carasca, & Jennifer Lathrop

Full-color boxed game with two-sided docking bay board, eight prepainted plastic robots, four two-sided factory floor boards, two factory floor guides, rulebook/course manual, eight program sheets, 30-second sand timer, 26 option cards, eight plastic flags, 84 program cards, and various tokens; \$49.95

If gaming follows trends, this is the year of the reprint, and not just new versions of any old game. This seems to be a summer (and a fall, and . . .) full of hard-to-find favorites making a comeback. Fantasy Flight has already pumped out a new version of *Arkham Horror*, they're planning a couple of new-old Games Workshop classics (*Warrior Knights*, *Fury of Dracula*), plus Avalon Hill's *Britannia*. Avalon Hill, on the other hand, is finally filling the *RoboRally* void we've had for the last seven years or so.

Richard Garfield's *Magic: The Gathering* star was still on the rise when Wizards of the Coast cranked this gem out. Robots raced around a deadly factory floor per their programming. Cards chosen at the beginning of each turn decided when you'd turn, move, or back up, and hopefully the various gears and conveyor belts surrounding you carried you where you wanted to go. The boards (which fit together in near-endless configurations for each game) also had perils to avoid such as open pits and laser beams, and if robots crossed paths, they could push each other a square or three off course, changing where his cards took him. Tagging numbered flags scattered about the playing field first won you the game.

Supplements were spawned, but when production stopped, prices at auction sites and conventions went through the roof, often to the tune of hundreds of dollars. Has the new version filled the hole?

You get fewer boards, but more selection; what was six pieces is now only four, but these boards are double sided (choose the four you'll use, or buy another set). Some are near-identical recreations of the original boards, but there are a few originals. Spin Zone moves and rotates robots a lot; the edges of the Vault make it a task to reach the repair-heavy center; and Chess is a rather clever checkerboard of conveyor belts. The formidable and dreaded Pit Maze and Cannery Row are gone -- in fact, crushers (board elements that snap shut and smush hapless robots) are missing from the new set entirely. The conveyor-heavy Maelstrom remains, so you're not getting off light. The boards themselves aren't mounted like they used to be . . . indeed, you punch them out like the counters. They're not cheesy, but they aren't as high a quality, either.

Option cards give you gear to change your offensive, defensive, and movement choices. You still get 26 of them, though for whatever reason two of the simplest -- the shield (reduces damage) and the turret (choose which way your weapon points) -- are gone, replaced by the more involved dual processor (use two movement cards) and crab legs (move sideways) from the [Armed and Dangerous](#) supplement.

Like the boards, the rest of the components diverge from the quality of the original. All the cards seem oh-so-slightly thinner, and the first **RoboRally** couldn't really afford any less stock. On the other hand, the counters (for tracking damage, etc.) are, if not tougher, at least better, easier to grasp than the tiny ones one once dealt with. On the gripping hand, you get plastic flags (eight now, instead of six, and a sheet of stickers). The old flat counters with printed flags weren't awful, but it's hard not to love these three-dimensional Day-Glo devices as they sit atop the board. Waiting for slow-pokes to finish programming their robot is no trouble if you use the new (pretty accurate at 30 seconds) sand timer to prod them into action.

A few robot miniatures are different, if it matters, but selection aside, the good news is the pieces are better. They're only plastic this time, not metal, but there's no mistaking which direction they face: Each robot's permanently affixed base is shaped like a pointed egg. They claim the robots are painted, but if so they're "painted" metallic, so the finish makes them all look rather alike at a glance. Everyone gets a "powered down" counter (to indicate you're going inactive to repair damage), but if you're destroyed, virtual archive copies are a thing of the past. Once upon a time you started as a flat counter (everyone had to fit on the same starting space, after all), but now these only mark which important board element you last touched. The game begins on a docking bay board (also with two sides, and thus two setups -- it matches the style of the playing boards), but destroyed robot miniatures are just set on the board according to new rules. Not as logical, but this way there's not an unwieldy stack of counters falling over.

One of the biggest additions is the course manual. This is a big selection of predetermined track layouts, rated for number of players (or teams, another new option), difficulty, and length. This is good for those who need a little guidance so their evening doesn't run into overtime, but it's almost two-thirds of the fancy, full-color rulebook. A couple of the maps use extra boards, requiring multiple **RoboRally** sets. Some have special rules, so instead of just tagging flags, you may have to capture them, be the last team to have touched all of them, or play tag while touching them (only the robot who's "it" can score a flag). Or maybe you'll forgo flags altogether and just beat the living gears out of the opposition. Overall it's a useful tool, and with a page of tips on how to develop your own effective tracks at the end, its utility is open-ended.

Although the original **RoboRally** had a lot of physical quality built in, the revamp makes some small but shrewd improvements. While the quality isn't up to the standards of the original (and it would be nice to hear more about what else the company has planned, though supplements may be contingent on how well this release does), it's not terrible, and being 10 bucks more expensive than the original cover price is a lot more digestible than online auction prices.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Cthulhu Rising: Call of Cthulhu Roleplaying In The 23rd Century (for call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by John Ossoway

Illustrated by Ben Thornley

62-page tape bound black and white book; \$15

Outside of a single scenario in the anthology *Strange Aeons*, no official scenario or supplement has projected the setting of Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* seen in its campaigns and anthologies beyond the very early 21st century. Only the eventual printing of Michael LaBossiere's *End Times* as a MULA (Miskatonic University Library Association) title has our future with regard to the Mythos been explored in any depth, the sourcebook positing a future in which Mythos elements have triumphed on Earth and forced mankind into exile on Mars. But perhaps a brace of magazine scenarios and now the latest in the MULA series suggests a more benign, less traumatic future. For the last five years John Ossoway has been creating a near future setting in which mankind unknowingly transports earthbound Mythos elements to the stars, while encountering other elements out there.

More extensively presented at his [website](#), John Ossoway's *Cthulhu Rising: Call of Cthulhu Roleplaying In The 23rd Century* provides some of the information presented therein in a handier package. In the 23rd Century, mankind has explored hundreds of star systems and settled approximately 100 of them in a 50 light-year radius along five distant arms. Colonies are founded in co-operative efforts between the five power blocs that dominate the United Earth Federation and the mega-corporations, some of whom are powerful enough to own colonies outright. With Earth still overcrowded, there is a strong desire among its populace to emigrate, but both the Interstellar Colonial Authority (ICA) and the Interstellar Trade Commission (ITC) strictly control the flow of humanity to the stars.

Security is provided by the United Earth Armed Forces in the Core systems, and by the Colonial Security Corps and the Interstellar Colonial Marine Corps (ICM). The ICM is a rapid deployment force, established to mobilize quickly and be sent out to settle military disputes in the colonies. The frequency of their deployment has substantially increased in the last 15 years or so in the wake of the Russian Civil War; colonies in the Outer Rim, dismayed at their failed petitions for greater autonomy, openly rebelled. Only via the intervention and negotiating skills of the Chrislamic Church has a ceasefire been agreed and now, a decade on in 2271, an uneasy peace continues.

A character in *Cthulhu Rising* is little different to an investigator of the 1920s or 2000s, though he possesses more skill points, representing his background, his occupation, and his personal interests. The wide range of listed occupations reflects the UEF requirement that every student either continues his education at university or takes the Federal Orientation Test and enters Federal Service for three years. All of the new occupations and skills are what you would expect of a near future science fiction setting, except for the inclusion of psionics.

Psionics have been a proven fact since 2112, their use being closely monitored, with there being psionic branches in law enforcement and the military. The Psychic Ability scale is rated from P1 (equal to a POW of 10) to P12 (equal to POW 21) and a minimum rating is needed for the game's various abilities. These are divided into four talent groups -- Telepathy, Precognition, Adjustment (the manipulation of the body), and Animation (Telekinesis). The various abilities are also skills, a character receiving points to assign to them in addition to his other skills.

Mechanically, ***Cthulhu Rising*** employs Chaosium's Basic Roleplay System, but adds to the simple version of ***Call of Cthulhu*** various elements from ***RuneQuest III***. These include the skill bonuses derived from primary attributes, hit locations, and the Strike Rank initiative rules.

Cthulhu Rising is split into two parts, the first covering the setting, the second the rules. The latter also includes an extensive list of personal equipment in addition to the details on character generation and psionics. The former concentrates primarily on the human state of affairs in 2271 rather than the state of the Mythos. This receives just four pages, including a timeline, and details of notable organizations. For example: the deep ones and its associated Cult of Cthulhu have spread beyond Earth to various water worlds, while the Earth Isolationists are in secret a cult of Shub-Niggurath worshippers. Organizations such as the Illuminati and the Freemasons, archenemies both, suggest a broader scope to the setting, as well as the greater influence of pop culture sci-fi and conspiracy theory.

The influences upon ***Cthulhu Rising*** are obvious and -- in many cases -- acknowledged. Primarily the influences are the film *Aliens* and the various extensions of the franchise, including William Gibson's script for *Alien3* and the *Colonial Marines Technical Manual*. Others include *Babylon 5*, GDW's near-future RPG ***2300AD***, and the works of both Harry Harrison and Philip K. Dick.

The result of this m lange of influences is an easily digested near-future science fiction setting that fits perfectly against a background of cosmic horror. But the influences may well prove to be a problem if Chaosium wants to bring ***Cthulhu Rising*** to full publication and distribution, as they are perhaps *too* obvious and derivative.

Addressing such a problem is far from insurmountable, but ***Cthulhu Rising*** has another problem in its current form. It is not a complete sourcebook for the Mythos in the 23rd century, since the book contains a number of omissions. There is no advice for the Keeper, or any scenarios, and the guide to the Mythos in 2271 is very much a primer upon the subject. This is a shame, because the author's website devoted to the setting promises much more. It includes the background, but also several scenarios that make up a campaign run along dual strands. In one, the players take the roles of military characters serving in the ICM, while in the second the characters are civilians, scientists, colonists, corporate officers, and so on.

What you have in ***Cthulhu Rising*** is not so much a complete campaign setting, but more the players' handbook for it. Purchasers looking for more will be disappointed, but at least they will be able to find what they need on the author's website. It is a pity though that Chaosium could not have given the author room to develop and showcase the ***Cthulhu Rising*** setting more effectively. A simple matter of doubling the page count and increasing the cost by another \$5, and ***Cthulhu Rising: Call of Cthulhu Roleplaying In The 23rd Century*** could well have been one of the best MULA titles to date: a nicely realized fan written setting made available to a wider audience in book format.

--Matthew Pook

Going Home (or Anywhere Else) Again

This week I'm editing the issue (and writing this column) on the road from exotic Orlando, Florida, home of the eleventy-jillionth World Yo-Yo Contest.

I was called here by my former boss who runs the event. Apparently I made a good impression, having been a none-too-small part of the past five contests, and he wanted someone around he could count on.

(When asked about why I came back, since everyone -- correctly -- believed me to be living 600 miles away now -- my running joke has been the *Godfather III* reference about trying to escape the Mafia: "Just when I think I'm out, they keep pulling me back in!")

Anyway, this has been an interesting experience. I haven't had much contact with these circles since I moved away . . . the friends and former coworkers I left from my former job, nor the yo-yoing community that one keeps abreast of via osmosis when one is surrounded by it.

Naturally, all this led me to wondering about the gaming applications.

See, the interesting thing about being called back to someplace after a long-ish period of time -- especially if it's a place you used to be closely tied to -- is that you simultaneously have a history with these folks and yet there's so much you *don't* know. I suspect it's why the High School Reunion party is so common a theme in murder mystery stories; the main character immediately knows who these people *were*, but not who they *are*.

Thus I discovered that one of my acquaintances was in a car accident in January and had one of her vertebrae broken; she's currently in physical therapy to overcome her need for a wheelchair or crutches to walk. One of my juggling friends has lost about 50 pounds (which, given that he probably weighed about 190 originally, is a significant percentage). One of my friends couldn't attend because his first child is expected to arrive within the next month. One of my friends has been laid off in the past year, and is now doing various freelance work. One of my friends let his hair grow in a pattern such that he resembles a cast member of *Starsky & Hutch*. And so on.

In an RPG, the use of a time-spanned event -- either a recurring event such as an annual convention, or a one-time event such as a wedding or funeral -- can provide a wonderful opportunity to present little-seen characters in a "where are they now?" snapshot. Really, introducing any kind of plot or storyline to such an event is almost trivial, although it should be handled with care lest players start associating these shindigs with a big scheming plot. (On the other hand, one could probably make a memorable ongoing campaign thread about going over the top: "Okay; who's going to be murdered at the Henderson Family Reunion *this* year?")

As a minor "let me tell you about my campaign" example, in our long-running *World of Darkness Dark Ages* campaign I had my vampire PC (who, since I was GMing, became an NPC) wander off for a while, leaving the fae court he was acquaintances with to their own adventures. After a couple of decades of adventures, I had the vampire return, complete with a couple of mortal friends that all characters were familiar with. The PCs got to meet with the vampire, who hadn't aged a day, and other mortals, who all had naturally aged by a couple of decades. There, in a snapshot, I was able to portray one of the most difficult concepts about vampiric immortality that I could: The rest of the world will crumble to dust, but this one person you knew will remain the same regardless of how many decades or centuries pass.

If you haven't incorporated some kind of long-running annual (or every-so-often) event into your campaign, consider doing so, to allow for a "snapshot" of events and characters to pass through time without needing to contrive terribly much. If nothing else, it will give your CIA operative, your occultist, and your ninja PCs reason to stand around a punch bowl.

* * *

Random Thought time: One of the nice things about getting to interact with old friends is that they understand where I come from (more or less) and could appreciate my sense of humor . . . or at least fake it really well. For example, one friend and I stopped for lunch at the con support suite, and we were talking about the processed turkey lunch meat we were eating (the kind that comes flavored like ham, pastrami, bologna, apricots . . . that sort of thing). Anyway, my friend refers to the lunch meat as "Turkey *surprise!*" and we commented that it wouldn't be a very good marketing idea to play up the "surprise" aspect. After pondering, however, I remarked, "Well, what would be your alternative? 'Turkey Rut'? 'This product will taste precisely like you expect it to: no more, no less. We assure you . . . you will not be surprised in the slightest by the flavor of this food. Today, tomorrow, and for the rest of your life: enjoy the certainty.'"

I have no idea if this translates well to text, or, really, if it was particularly funny to begin with. (Lots of things seem funnier when you spend 10 hours strait working at a con.) But I knew that, even with my vaunted extrapolatory skills, I couldn't turn lunch meat commentary into a full column.

Unless I was really desperate.

--*Steven Marsh*

After-Action Report: My (Second) *Unknown Armies* Game

*"Keep a clean nose
Watch the plain clothes
You don't need a weather man
To know which way the wind blows"*
-- Bob Dylan, "Subterranean Homesick Blues"

Well, we've done [this twice](#), now, to reasonable levels of acclaim, so I think I'll do it again. Abandoning the pronouns, this is another Applied Suppressed Transmission, an example of my own RPG campaign design and practice. This time around, the campaign had a more structured "mission" approach -- no need to waste time leading the characters ever-so-slowly to the river's edge when I could just throw them in.

Our river ran for just four months this time, from April 2005 to this week. Four players and I mapped out the secret world four hours a night every Monday. Its abbreviated nature came from the outside -- one of my four players will be leaving us for law school next month, so we had to keep it short. And since he was leaving, we built the game around his preferences; he's from a military family and closely follows various arcana of international relations, plus he had heard good things about my earlier [Unknown Armies](#) game. So, a modern-day, "technothriller" sort of special-ops *Unknown Armies* game it would be. Fortunately, I knew just the folks to build it on.

"Conventional weathermen rely on data to analyze and predict. Often we are deployed in places where we can only rely on our technical skills and senses to forecast. We're not just inside a building looking at a screen and pulling data down off a system, we're out in the middle of it. . . . You'll find us walking around in the dirt, in 'nowhere land,' providing weather input . . . [and we are] often the only source of weather information in a region."
-- Major Bob Russell, USAF, 10th Combat Weather Sqdn

Weather is the ultimate symbol of the quantum information world modeled by *Unknown Armies*, from the famous "butterfly in Brazil" of chaos theory to the postmodern choose-your-own-Apocalypse of global warming to the Bob Dylan song that named a terror cult as crazy as any Greg Stolze ever invented. And as it happens, the United States Air Force has a special tactics unit with the oh-so-evocative tag of [Combat Weathermen](#). Better yet, they are the "Grey Berets." The 720th Special Tactics Group (which name has its own kind of brutalist poetry to it) have the beautifully paradoxical task of being airmen deployed on the ground, "establishing the weather" for other Special Forces operations. Note Major Russell's unconscious Heisenbergism, above; the Grey Berets are the "only source of weather information" in "nowhere land." The Grey Berets, and only the Grey Berets, get to peek inside Schrodinger's Box, and know which way the wind blows. I don't know about you, but that just screamed "campaign setup" to me.

Now, I should admit that had this been for publication, or even for a campaign that would last a year, I might well have dug more into the nitty-gritty of actual meteorology, combat and otherwise. It is my considered opinion that any suitably recondite field of study can become a metaphor for magic, from electrical engineering to non-Euclidean math. I'm sure there's plenty of High Strangeness up in the troposphere, and much occultism to be mixed in with the occluded fronts. But as it was, I decided to hit the metaphorical angle harder, and leave the climate science in the flavor text. So, having eschewed any hard work on the physics, meta- or otherwise, I did the same with the story structure and just ripped off *Planetary*.

"Go a little deeper, and you find strangeness and wonder on a planetary scale. . . . What if you could take everything old and make it new again? . . . Sometimes, ordinary people uncover things that are best left covered. Sometimes, things best left covered emerge into ordinary life and do not have the world's best interests at heart. . . . It's about, as Alan Moore put it, 'mad and beautiful ideas'; the sense of wonder, the feeling of marvellous secret things just beyond our field of vision, and the revelations and splendours and dangers and bastards tied up in it all . . ."
-- Warren Ellis, original proposal for *Planetary*

With the high concept decided -- essentially "Tom Clancy's *Planetary*" -- the basic campaign structure built itself. The players took the roles of Detachment 33 of the 10th Combat Weather Squadron, based out of Hurlburt Field in Florida. (One player, technically, played a CIA "contractor" on loan to the unit; the others were Air Force.) At the beginning of each adventure, Colonel Leverett would summon the PCs to the big building on the edge of the field, into the room with no windows and no electrical outlets, and give them a proper *Mission: Impossible* style briefing. ("Gentlemen. The spot you're looking at on the coast of Lebanon has shown an anomalous level of anticyclonic wind activity as far back as 1919. Also, no roses have grown there this spring. Check it out.") The briefing would set up the surface crisis -- terrorists, Syrians, Chinese agents, whatever -- and the PCs would drop in to find out What Was Really Going On. And that, I decided from the first, would always be Something from the statospheric, mythic past emerging (or being pulled) into the Now, with unpredictable consequences. What Warren Ellis did with *Godzilla* and Doc Savage, I wanted to do with King Solomon's Mines and the Holy Grail. I didn't really know who the overarching Bad Guys would be -- I didn't want to rip off *that* much -- so I figured I'd find out along with the players.

"Under the constellation of Pleiades, they made the image of a little Virgin with the Figure of a Lamp; it is reported to increase the light of the eyes, to assemble Spirits, to raise Winds, to reveal secret and hidden things . . . Under the wing of Corvus, they made the image of a . . . Man cloathed in black; this maketh a man cholerick, bold, couragious, full of thoughts . . . and causeth uneasy dreams; also it giveth the power of driving away evil spirits, and of gathering them together; it is profitable against the malice of Men, Devils, and Winds."
-- Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*

And from then on it was all (and is all) about the war stories. The "mission structure" game is one of the very, very easiest to run, which is probably why it's so very, very common from *Dungeons & Dragons* ("Gentlemen. The dungeon entrance you're looking at . . .") to *Call of Cthulhu* ("Gentlemen. The mutilated corpse you're not looking at . . ."). All I had to do was come up with a crisis spot somewhere in today's world (the campaign calendar always started on the same date we started the adventure, to prevent too much chance of history sneaking up on us) and then figure out something mythical to put there.

When I started the game, the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon was big news, so that was the obvious first spot. What else is in Beirut? Why, [St. George](#) and the Dragon, that's what. George's Spear is actually supposed to be in a well in Beirut now occupied by a Hezbollah madrassa, which gave me a slightly too-convenient McGuffin, and Khidr for my Dragon. I decided that the modern-day English crusader was obviously James Bond -- er, "James Grey," the Godwalker of the Knight; like Doc Brass in *Planetary*, he symbolized the "old order," trapped in the Cold War past. The PCs' goal was to recover the Spear and turn it over to the Chained Maiden -- i.e., to Lebanon, in the person of a [beautiful Lebanese revolutionary](#). The Dragon can be tamed, instead of killed. (Just in case, though, I had some evil Syrian Mukhabarat types and a Chinese agent named Lung -- "dragon" -- standing by.) By the sort of coincidence that follows me around, in Real History the Syrians pulled out of Beirut on April 23, 2005 -- St. George's Day.

The rest of the sessions ran basically the same way, albeit with fewer geopolitical repercussions in my morning paper. I'd ruminate about some country in the news, and pull a big old mythic Something out of its backyard. I put King Solomon's Mines in Great Zimbabwe, and had a Sierra Leone hand-chopping sorcerer with the Seal of Solomon allied with Robert Mugabe in trying to awaken Ayesha, [Queen of Sheba](#), and her zombie hordes. (Did you know that H. Rider Haggard knew Cecil Rhodes quite well? They had many lovely chats about vast stretches of Matabeleland that only Rhodes had traveled. And then Rhodes found all those diamonds, and was buried on the sacred mountain of the Matabele. I swear, I never need to make anything up any more.) Iran was a toughie; I almost ran an adventure starting *in media res* with the PCs pinned down by Revolutionary Guards, taking refuge in the original Paradise (Old Persian *pairadaeza*, meaning "walled enclosure, garden") and meeting the angel with a fiery sword, but it would have been all talk and no shoot. Big no-no, in gaming and in technothrillers. So I punted (I thought) to a "haunted castle fakeout" leading to a fight on the Mountain of Alamut.

In Peter Willey's *Castles of the Assassins*, I found a castle, Samiran, that now sits on an island in the middle of an artificial lake -- Tim-Powers style "tamed water." So I packed the PCs off there to reactivate an old CIA radio transmitter I made up and wait for the diversion. Thanks to some inspired roleplaying, and the fact that Samiran turns out to be even spookier than I thought, the PCs uncovered a sealed gateway into the [previous universe](#) instead. Even when I *hadn't* planted a story there, between my players and a little bisociation, it turned out that I had. (Total And

Blatant War Story Digression: Josh asks me, "So you're saying that the CIA invented a way to power a sorcerous radio transmitter by tapping the divergent potential between this universe and the previous one?" I respond, impromptu, "Of course not. They *stole* that technology from the Nazis." We *almost* started playing that prequel game, instead.)

I never needed to do much research; just come up with Bad Guys, a Dangerous Location, and a suitable **Unknown Armies** spin on an ancient legend or artifact therefrom. Most of my research doubled as visual aids; not just the photos of Samiran Castle from Willey's book, but, say, the [article on Noah's Ark](#) in *Fortean Times* #120. That got the PCs into a confrontation on the Turkish border with the Five Dragons, a *Chinese* occult special ops team that wanted to destroy the Ark to make Fa He's Ark (in the Tien Shan) the Source of Mankind and rewrite the statosphere with Eastern archetypes. The players liked the Chinese team so much as villains that I put them in the next one, leagued with Jemaah Islamiyah in Sumatra to kidnap and reprogram the next incarnation of Sindbad the Sailor. (I never did come up with a proper terrorist Bad Guy, but the jihadis made excellent mooks.) We were going to end with a good old-fashioned Grail Quest to a lost Templar castle in Kyrgyzstan, and a Dark Tower in the Aral Sea Waste Land, but time ran out on us. With no deadline, I could probably have run this game long enough to do some real weather research. As it was, between the comforting "mission plan" method, the occasional firefight to keep everyone's adrenaline flowing, and the sheer genius that is **Unknown Armies**, I barely had to lift a finger to steer. The lesson, which I re-learn every time I run a game like this one, is "structure pays dividends and lets you trust your players to improvise." It turns out you *don't* need a weather man to know which way the wind blows. Just get out your kite and see for yourself.

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



An Insufficiently Advanced Technology

Alternate Paths For Low-Tech Development

by Matt Riggsby

The **GURPS** TL system, up to TL8, is based on historical precedent. Individual **GURPS** campaigns, though, may not be, which can be a problem for world-builders. Is it an anachronism too far to arm your Bronze Age cities with cannon? Let your knights in shining armor use spyglasses? Put a clock tower in a Roman city? Give your horse-riding nomads the occasional ride on a steam train? If they don't exist yet, can time/world/dimension-hopping PCs find the parts to make them? If they do, what are the supporting technologies which would have to exist beforehand, and what are the ramifications of having those around? This article explores a number of early (generally TL4 and earlier) technologies with a focus on the pre-conditions which make them possible. With this, you can start to figure out what technologies high-tech can visitors easily introduce to a low-tech world, what are plausible alternate paths for technological development, and what developments are going to take a lot of time and work instead of just big ideas.

Cast Iron and Steel

Iron is an oddity, so far as the ancient smith is concerned. It's strong and easy to find, but difficult to work with. While other metals could be melted down, ancient smiths couldn't reach iron's melting point, 1540°C, in their furnaces. They could smelt iron from its ore, but it would be in a soft but solid mass which had to be separated from a matrix of slag. This was, first of all, extremely inefficient. Smiths could rarely get more than half of the iron out of ore, and usually got no more than a quarter. This also placed restrictions on the reuse of iron. Iron tools could not be melted down as other metals could. Historically, European smiths only solved these problems at the dawn of the Renaissance, the border between TLs 3 and 4, with the invention of high-temperature blast furnaces. However, there are some ways around these restrictions.

The key is control of carbon content. Iron with a very low carbon content (say, less than 0.1%) is quite malleable. This sort of metal is wrought iron, which is what ancient smiths produced in their furnaces. As the carbon content increases, so do strength and hardness. Good steels have a carbon content between 1% and 1.5%. To produce a tool, bits of metal were hammered extensively on hot charcoal furnaces, which, smiths discovered, would harden the piece. What they didn't understand was the chemistry of the operation. At high temperatures and with much working, carbon will infiltrate the iron, eventually turning a surface layer into steel. By the time you hit a 2% carbon content, though, the metal becomes so hard as to be brittle and cannot feasibly be worked. But the other effect of adding that much carbon is that iron's melting point drops precipitously, to about 1150°C, which was well within the range of temperatures available to ancient smiths. Most obviously, this makes production of iron from ore much more efficient because far more molten iron runs out of the slag than just-smelted iron can be beaten out of it. Just as importantly, the cast iron can subsequently be "cooked" at lower temperatures to remove some of the carbon, turning into steel far more efficiently than starting with wrought iron and working your way up with hammering. The cooking process isn't immediately obvious, but it's not a far leap from heat-treating processes an ancient smith would already know.

So how do you get that much carbon into iron? Indian smiths did it by finely grinding a mix of charcoal and iron into a sealed crucible. Enough carbon could enter the iron to lower its melting point and melt it, leaving a mass of *wootz*, the raw material of Damascus steel. However, this technique limited the smith to very small quantities, depended on crushing the ore very, very finely, and working the resulting metal extensively to break down crystalline structures that form within it. Chinese and European smiths did it with a forced draught and a lot of fuel. Increased airflow burns more fuel faster, which serves the dual purpose of raising the furnace's temperature and putting more carbon into the air for absorption into the iron. This technique can melt iron in industrial quantities. Building such a furnace is a non-trivial task, of course. Europeans only managed to do it by developing bellows driven by waterwheels, which is why it took them until TL4.

The Chinese were able to do the same thing, though, by building furnaces which happened to provide improved airflow around 500 BC (about two thousand years before Europe, and less than a thousand years after they started making iron themselves). This would have been at least mid-TL2 in China, but it might be hard to argue that it was on the late edge of TL3. And apparently iron casting isn't limited to such technological sophisticates. The Chinese weren't the only ones to cast iron before the Europeans. So did the Africans. It appears that, using relatively small furnaces with tall chimneys to improve exhaust and air forced by a series of hand-pumped bellows, smiths in central Africa -- who were otherwise at the early edge of TL2 -- were able to melt and cast iron in the 13th century. It appears, therefore, that the technology to produce cast iron and steel is attainable by quite low-tech societies if they're fortunate enough to figure out a furnace design.

Clocks and Clockwork

Historically, mechanical clocks begin to appear in the later part of TL3 (early clocks might be regarded as advanced technology, and spring-driven clocks are definitely TL4). Could they show up any earlier? A mechanical clock has three important parts: a power source to drive motion, an escapement to regulate it, and a gear train to translate the movements of the inner workings to a display (for which, see below). For a power source, just about anything providing a fairly consistent energy input -- from a weight on a rope to a stream of water -- will serve, although something that doesn't rely on gravity, like a coiled spring (which requires TL4 metallurgy to be effective), is necessary for a mobile clock.

The escapement is rather trickier. The escapement, the part of the clock that makes the "tick-tock" sound, makes sure that the clock mechanism moves at a consistent and limited speed. Just about every design of escapement involves a U-shaped bit which rocks back and forth to mesh with and then release the gear train, stopping and restarting the motion from the power source more or less regularly. It's the "more-or-less" that's the problem here. Even a simple escapement is a complex and delicate bit of machinery, and early ones are extremely sensitive to temperature variations, friction, gear wear, changing levels of force from the power source, and the shock and vibration caused by their own motion, making them very inaccurate. It took centuries of detail work to perfect methods of timekeeping, with nearly six centuries and two TLs separating the invention of the mechanical clock and the development of a chronometer accurate enough to allow the calculation of longitude.

There's no particular reason to believe they attempted to do so, but it's not implausible to imagine particularly sophisticated TL2 philosophers making moves in the direction of modern clockwork once gearing has been invented. However, because of the understanding of material science and state of metallurgy needed to produce portable and accurate timepieces or simply well-regulated automata, early clockwork is unlikely to produce worthwhile timepieces until late in TL3. Still, it could be useful for applications where accurate regulation isn't necessary, such as automated displays in temples and secret doors opened by a remote, hidden switch.

Distillation

Although distillation isn't attested to until the early Middle Ages and doesn't become an industrial-strength technology until the early modern period, basic distillation is a possibility as soon as metalworking technology becomes available. An alembic, an early distillation vessel, is simply a pot with a tight-fitting lid which has a tube protruding from it, usually at a downward angle, making the vessel faintly resemble a penguin with a long beak. Alembics were often fragile and heated indirectly, placed in a more durable pot filled with sand or water. The heavier pot would be heated, gradually bringing the alembic to the desired temperature (a common term for the culinary technique of moderating temperature by putting a baking dish in a water bath, *bain marie*, comes from the name of a legendary alchemist who purportedly developed it). An alembic isn't terribly difficult to produce and would be attainable by a TL1 culture which made the conceptual leap to recognizing that vapors could be condensed by cooling them and the further leap that those vapors might be worth keeping. Having primitive distillation might not be an enormous step forward for a very low-tech society, but it would improve the production of perfumes and medicines (hard liquor was treated as a medicine for centuries before it became a popular drink), which could give it a small economic advantage.

Moreover, there are some important limits on the technology. Without ability to measure temperature, it is extremely

difficult to control the distillation process. Heat control is limited to very crude visual distinctions. Like a cook, an alchemist can distinguish between (for example) faintly steaming, simmering, and boiling, but usually can't consistently reach and maintain a particular target temperature. This makes it difficult to separate different distillable substances, particularly if they have boiling points fairly close together, and ensures that no product of distillation will be completely pure, and that a significant amount of vapor will escape into the air rather than condense and run into the collection vessel. Longer beaks (providing more surface area for cooling) and water jackets (a sleeve around the beak through which water can be run, cooling it and accelerating condensation) are certainly technologically possible as soon as distillation is invented, but the underlying level of materials technology may make improved alembics economically unfeasible. Metal distillation vessels may also react with the substances being distilled, causing further problems until glass alembics become feasible at TL3.

Finer separations can be made with fractional distillation, a set of processes historically introduced in the 19th century (mid-late TL5). Fractional distillation usually involves letting vapor travel up a tall column with recessed cells along the sides. As vapors travel up the column, they slowly cool. Chemicals with higher boiling points condense in the lower cells and chemicals with lower boiling points condense higher up. Individual cells can then be tapped to draw off whatever relatively pure chemicals have collected at that level. A fractional distillation column would be, as such things go, relatively easy to build by making compartments individually, sticking them together, and poking a long hole down the middle. It could easily be built not long after the invention of distillation. However, using it well is problematic. Without the ability to monitor and control temperature, an alchemist might divide a solution into a number of different chemicals, but not be able to figure out just what chemicals (or combinations thereof) have ended up in which compartments. Still, it might be a step in the right direction.

Explosives

The most easily attainable explosive is gunpowder. It requires sulfur, which may be gathered in a fairly pure form from hot springs and volcanoes or at worst isolated from various minerals; charcoal, which is easily produced from wood; and saltpeter. Crystals of saltpeter (potassium nitrate) will eventually collect naturally underneath dungheaps, often maintained as fertilizer by farmers who also keep domestic animals, or under large guano deposits that accumulate around long-term habitats of bats and flocks of birds. It also exists in mineral deposits and can also be intentionally manufactured by letting manure and plant wastes ferment and refining a white powder out of them. As far back as the Neolithic (late TL0), saltpeter was used as an aid to fire-starting, so the raw ingredients of gunpowder are likely to be available even before metalworking. It then becomes a question of mixing them together in approximately the right proportions. Anything that comes even vaguely close to the modern proportions of two parts charcoal, three parts sulfur and fifteen parts saltpeter will be an effective explosive; many Medieval mixes were only half saltpeter.

Another relatively attainable but more difficult early explosive is nitrocellulose, or guncotton. Plant material (usually cotton although wood fibers can be used as well) is soaked in nitric and sulfuric acid for several hours, washed thoroughly, and left to dry. The resulting substance, while it still resembles cotton, is extremely flammable and, when contained, explosive (it's also nearly smokeless, which is a nice advantage over gunpowder). However, even under ideal conditions, raw nitrocellulose isn't as effective as gunpowder. It *does* become a powerful explosive, about three times as powerful as gunpowder, when treated with certain solvents, including alcohol, ether, and acetone, something which wasn't attempted until the 19th century. Legend has it that nitrocellulose was discovered accidentally (a chemist spilled some acid on his apron, which later exploded, presumably without the chemist wearing it), making its discovery plausible for any society with strong acids. Dousing it with solvents just to see what will happen is less likely, but it's not impossible that an alchemist would try it to see if it washed away impurities more effectively.

The early introduction of gunpowder is unlikely to make enormous changes outside of military technology. Heavily armored troops will probably fade away (albeit more slowly than in our history if early bombs and guns aren't as powerful as ours because of inferior materials), and [fortifications](#) will assume the same shapes like those of our gunpowder era. Explosives can be used to make mining more efficient, but they weren't employed in our history until TL5, so that application may not be immediately apparent.

Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen notwithstanding, time travelers setting out to build gunpowder-based empires in low-tech

worlds shouldn't count on a permanent monopoly. Gunpowder is composed of readily available components, is easy to make, and will require a sizable industrial enterprise to make enough to supply an army, which means a significant number of people will have access to the secret of its manufacture. Sooner or later, word will get out, as it did in our history. Even Greek fire, the great military secret of the Middle Ages, was eventually found out or was independently invented, and it (or something very much like it) was used by several different groups. The time travelers will have a head start, but their advantage does have a time limit.

Fire

It sounds trivial, but the ability to make fires and generate heat is one which becomes increasingly sophisticated over time. The technical term for it is pyrotechnology. Leslie White, a prominent anthropologist of the previous century, proposed that a culture's development could be measured by the amount of energy it was able to use. If that is indeed the case, pyrotechnology is a reasonable snapshot of that advancement. Since there are many different ways a society can achieve higher and higher temperatures (better fuels, improved airflow through combustibles, etc.), we won't get into specifics of how such temperatures can be achieved. Rather, we'll use TLs as rule-of-thumb indications of what temperatures a society can achieve.

A good wood fire can reach 600°C without much trouble. Simple fires for cooking predate *Homo sapiens* considerably, so that's safely TL0. Earthenware pottery, which dates to the Neolithic (late TL0), can be produced at 700°C. That's just below the melting point of silver and well over the melting points of tin and lead.

Copper melts at around 1084°C (gold melts a few degrees lower), which is a convenient boundary for the beginning of TL1. That's just a few degrees below the temperature necessary to produce glass, about 1100°C, which doesn't appear until well into the TL; the pyrotechnology to support glass develops before the relevant chemical know-how.

Depending on certain chemical conditions, iron ore can be smelted and turned into wrought iron at anything from 1100°C to 1500°C (it can actually be smelted at much lower temperatures, but it doesn't become soft enough to work until it gets into that range). 1200°C, though, is a comfortable threshold for most common iron-smelting processes, so that makes a reasonable boundary for the beginning of TL2.

TL3 furnaces could doubtless achieve somewhat higher temperatures, but they don't appear to have been enormously better than TL2 furnaces. Any additional energy TL3 societies could bring to bear came from wind and water power. Finally, pure iron melts at 1540°C, which isn't a bad boundary for TL4.

It's worth noting that just because a society can reach certain temperatures, it won't necessarily develop all related technologies associated with those temperatures. For example, stoneware pottery, which is somewhat less porous and more waterproof than earthenware, can be produced starting at 1200°C. That would make stoneware a TL2 development, but it only appears in Europe in the early Middle ages. Pottery vitrifies (that is, takes on an internal structure like glass) and becomes porcelain at 1300°C, although only certain clays can take temperatures that high. That makes it potentially a TL2 or TL3 development, but Europeans didn't identify the necessary clays to make it until TL5.

Don't Try This At Home, Kids!

Something worth keeping in mind about low-tech research is that it is very dangerous. Early steam engines, for example, had a habit of exploding. Alchemists will regularly be exposed to all manner of toxic substances, have little or no safety equipment ("A fume hood, my liege?"), and will taste chemical samples as a regular part of determining what they are. They may not know that they're working with poisonous chemicals, and may even believe that some of them are healthful.

Working with explosives and potential explosives is even more dangerous. Modern amateurs, even if they know what they're working towards (say, using the *Anarchist's Cookbook*), are as likely to blow themselves up as anything else, and that's doubly true for ancient alchemists who were trying to figure things out as they went along. As some kinds of explosive manufacture became commonplace, so did accidents. Even though there was some awareness of safety precautions, such as working with wet materials, explosions at Medieval gunpowder factories were regular occurrences.

Gearing

Gears are an important part of just about any powered mechanical device, from wristwatches to locomotives to electric mixers. Being able to transfer power from a power source -- be it human, animal, water, wind, steam, or anything else -- to the working tool is vital to the industrial production of higher TLs. Simple gearing (and similar technologies like belts), which could transmit power for tools like grindstones and trip hammers, appears around the third century BC (early-mid TL2), with the appearance of waterwheels and moderately sophisticated water clocks. Complex gearing doesn't become a common technology until late TL3 or even TL4, with the appearance of mechanical clocks and sophisticated water-powered and wind-powered machinery.

But that's not a necessary delay. It appears that gears became very sophisticated very quickly after their invention. Within two centuries, there is evidence that clever mechanists were producing orreries (models of the solar system which simulate synchronized planetary motion), making a variety of sophisticated gear trains like those found in clocks potentially a TL2 development. But, of course, such gear trains are not without their limitations, which may explain why they never became particularly widespread and vanished at the end of classical antiquity.

The problem with low-tech gears is not that they're conceptually difficult (Greek and Roman scholars clearly had a firm grasp of the math), but that they're difficult to make and only moderately useful once you've made the effort. The vast majority of gears, used in waterwheel-powered mills, were wooden and wore out quickly under the high strain, making simple industrial gearing an expensive proposition and complex gearing prohibitive. There are also any number of devilish details. Such gears would also be produced without a deep understanding of material science and some of the finer points of the application of force, and would consequently be very susceptible to jamming and malfunction as a result of temperature changes, excessive friction, changing humidity, even less than optimum tooth shape, all of which are factors engineers spent centuries learning to overcome.

A reasonably good group of craftsmen from as early as TL1 could make simple gears once they had the idea, but at considerable cost. However, there's also not a lot you can do with gears without a reliable power source and regulation. If power and control come from a hand crank, you're limited to expensive toys like orreries and perhaps exceedingly expensive computing devices which might resemble cash registers. Until developments to harness water and wind power in TL2 arise, there's little that can be done with them which can't be done less expensively some other way.

Greek Fire

Formally a TL3 invention, so little is known for sure about Greek fire that it's hard to say for sure whether or not its development be pushed back any farther. Cautious scholarly opinion holds that its primary ingredient was naptha, a combination of lighter fractions of petroleum. It may be that it was produced by *extremely* careful distillation (the effects of petroleum fumes reaching an open flame are left as an exercise for the GM), or perhaps by some other long-lost chemical process which drew off heavier fractions of crude oil. The naptha, if that's what it was, was mixed with a variety of other chemicals, although what they may have been and whether or not they would actually have enhanced its effectiveness is an open question. The naptha itself, projected by pumps (available at TL2 and at least conceivable at TL1), would have been a sufficiently formidable weapon. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that Greek fire would have required the chemical sophistication of TL3 (or perhaps unusually advanced chemistry in a TL2 civilization), but the most important element was access to its necessary raw ingredient, petroleum. Even the cleverest time traveler won't be able to reinvent the flamethrower if he can't get oil.

Guns

Once gunpowder has been invented, it's not very difficult to start making crude guns. All one needs is a sturdy tube of metal, fully open at one end and with a touchhole on the other to set off the powder. A good early TL1 smith could make a small cannon or musket out of cast bronze. Lever-driven matchlocks could follow soon thereafter, and flintlocks are conceivable in TL3 when tolerably good springs become possible.

But they wouldn't get much better than that any time soon. It might be possible to rifle barrels, but the problems of precise production and ensuring a close fit between barrel and bullet would make it extremely difficult to manufacture ammunition which would benefit from it until better industrialization appears (TL4 at the very earliest, and more likely TL5).

Modern cartridges, where the gunpowder is ignited by a primary charge, which is in turn detonated by a shock delivered by a firing pin, are even more problematic. The basic mechanism of the gun isn't too much of a stretch for a TL4 society (strong springs would be a problem before that point), but the ammunition is. Ignoring the high cost of producing many identical brass cartridges, pressure-sensitive explosives strain even the theoretical capacity of TL3 and even TL4 chemistry, and only become feasible at higher TLs. Moreover, even if a TL3 alchemist did somehow manage to stumble across one of the earliest primary explosives such as mercury fulminate (alcohol, nitric acid, and mercury heated to 60°C), he probably wouldn't live to tell about it. Primary explosives are very sensitive to shock, and the alchemist would most likely discover their explosive properties by blowing himself up.

Industrial Chemicals

Disinfectant, solvent, and intoxicant, ethyl alcohol is one of the first useful chemicals humans started manufacturing, towards the late end of TL0. Of course, the alcohol content of wine and beer tops out at around 12% and is often much lower, which is fine for a relaxing drink but not so good for industrial purposes. In TL3, it became possible to produce alcohol solutions of up to 70% alcohol after repeated distillation. Pushing back the invention of distillation would almost automatically push back the invention of hard alcohol.

Sulfuric, nitric, and other strong acids were produced in very small quantities by Medieval alchemists probably as far back as the 10th century (mid TL3), usually by cooking readily-obtained sulfur-containing metallic ores, sometimes in connection with saltpeter. The acids produced were frequently employed directly in vapor form for metallic assay tests but could be condensed into a liquid form. Obviously, this requires the invention of distillation and of vessels which can withstand acids, which generally means glass. The raw materials for producing acids can be obtained at TL1, but because of its material and complex shape, a glass alembic -- and consequently the effective distillation of acids -- is at best a mid-TL 2 invention. Their independent discovery would only require a sufficiently inquisitive chemist, perhaps trying to distill the "essence" of the ores as an alternative to smelting.

Ether can be produced by treating alcohol with sulfuric acid and distilling the resulting solution; the process was primitive and time-consuming, taking months. This was first reported in the 13th century (late TL3), although its anesthetic properties weren't remarked on for nearly three more centuries.

Acetone can be derived from natural products of fermentation. However, it is produced by relatively small quantities by most bacteria and it requires relatively sophisticated distillation technology to isolate. It was not isolated until the dawn of the 17th century, and it would be difficult to push its discovery before the beginning of TL4. Even then, it would be difficult to produce in large quantities until fractional distillation is perfected.

Lenses

The basics of how lenses work were known long before it became possible to make them. Before the advent of glassblowing, the only available lenses are fortuitously shaped transparent gemstones, which are rare, prohibitively expensive, and very difficult to shape to any kind of specification. With the advent of glassblowing, it becomes at least theoretically possible to produce lenses by making hollow glass containers and filling them with water or simply make a thick sphere of solid glass. However, such lenses are heavy, fragile, expensive, and still not very good except for gross, irregular magnification. During the infancy of glassblowing, they'll also suffer from irregularities in the surface and uneven clarity. Colorless glass didn't appear until the second century AD, and even then it had horrible optical properties.

Useful optics require two products of long development: relatively clear glass and even, consistent grinding technology. The former was the process of centuries of ongoing chemical experimentation. It's probably no accident

that the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, which saw the rise of practical optics, also saw several important technological developments in glassmaking such as the development of leaded glass (an accelerating glass industry also made it easier for interested scholars to seek out glass objects made to their specifications). The latter requires the same sort of machining technology that underlies waterwheels and pottery wheels but adapted to more delicate work. Both technologies took a very long time to perfect, so the theory of optics developed well in advance of practice. Consequently, clumsy man-made magnifying devices are mid-TL2, wearable magnifying lenses limited to 4× magnification or so are TL3. Concave lenses are apparently more difficult to grind than convex lenses, so they come even later.

Microscopes and Telescopes

Powerful magnifying devices obviously require the development of lenses which are not just good magnifiers, but good enough that the images they produce can be viewed through a similar lens without excessive distortion, which is yet another level of refinement in material technology. Crude compound microscopes and telescopes giving up to 20× are on the border of TL4, although provided with a lucky break in lens technology, telescopes may very well develop far earlier. Fixed telescopes with [absurd focal lengths](#), which can get by with relatively inferior lenses, will also develop before portable spyglasses.

Historically, there was a limited dodge for microscopes which arose late in TL4. When a ball of glass is blown, a bead forms on the side of the ball opposite the pipe. That bead is tiny, generally less than a half-inch across, but remarkably smooth and even. If the surrounding glass is snapped off, it serves as a remarkably powerful lens. This is the sort of lens used in the original van Leeuwenhoek microscopes. Since the power and clarity of these single "blown" lenses was far superior to that of contemporary compound arrangements of ground lenses, the development of the compound microscope, though attempted several times, didn't really take off until a century after van Leeuwenhoek's early single-lens microscopes. Unfortunately, they're too small to be used in telescopes or as everyday vision aids. Nevertheless, a clever glass-blower might notice the tiny lens-like swelling and invent microscopy as early as reasonably clear glass appears, perhaps early in TL3.

Reflecting telescopes require similar optical fineness, but over a larger surface area, making them even more difficult to build. Again, theory preceded practice: Muslim scholars experimented with parabolic mirrors at least as early as the late 10th century, and their work was followed up by Europeans at least as early as the 13th. A time traveler couldn't get them made if he furnished specifications, but a clever Medieval scholar provided with out-of-TL production technology might figure out how to make one on his own.

Paper

This isn't a particularly obvious invention, but it would be easy to invent, particularly if felt is already produced, and very welcome in a literate culture. Paper-making requires little more than finely chopped textile fibers (wood pulp doesn't come along until much later) suspended in a large quantity of water, then scooped out with a fine-meshed, flat-bottom sieve. The resulting paper will have a rough surface and absorb a great deal of ink, but those problems can be solved fairly easily and it will still provide a much cheaper alternative to parchment and vellum. This is potentially a TL1 invention, or even TL0 (although writing is itself TL1, so there would be little point in TL0 paper), and once it is introduced, paper-makers will likely experiment with ways to make it smoother and less absorbent. Still, although paper is cheaper than animal-skin alternatives and even papyrus, it's not likely to make much of a dent in book prices. The real cost there is in writing, not raw materials.

Printing

Although they would be expensive, moveable type and the printing press are entirely conceivable at TL1. Written language must exist, of course (and it's much easier if the language uses an alphabet rather than a syllabary or hieroglyphics), as must the ability to raise and lower a heavy weight. The first printing presses were adapted from apple presses, but an olive press (easily achievable by a Bronze Age civilization) would fit the bill as well.

The type itself is the most expensive but probably most straightforward part. It would require a large number of individual characters of a uniform size, depth being more important than height and width to ensure that all characters will touch the page. If casting raised characters is prohibitively difficult (which it might be), a low-TL approach might involve casting several bars of the same depth and possibly height, cutting them into segments, and carving characters out of them. It might be cheaper to carve into the metal rather than to cut around a raised character, making early printing largely black with white letters rather than the reverse.

There are some less obvious issues, though. Water-based inks tend to smear; one of the things that made Guttenberg's press possible was the introduction of oil-based pigments late in the Middle Ages. An early press would be limited to relatively large type, suitable for reading from a moderate distance. Rather than books, an early press might produce posters, making reading by the masses a public act rather than something done tucked away in one's library. The durability of early paper is also an issue, which might reinforce a tendency towards low-volume, high-readership posters.

Of course, it would require a large number of literate people within easy reach of the printer to make it feasible to invest that much effort into the enterprise, so it's unlikely that the printing press would arise on its own in a Bronze Age civilization, even if somebody thought of it. However, it might find acceptance in a TL2 empire like Rome or China, where a large number of people would need to read the same legal codes and proclamations or want to read important bodies of religious texts or literary works.

Powered Mills

Wind or water, early powered mills initially share a similar design. Horizontal mills are essentially an axle placed on its end with a grindstone on one end (or, occasionally, some slightly more sophisticated equipment) and an arrangement resembling a horizontal paddlewheel on the other. One side of the paddlewheel is shielded so that the wind or water will push on the other. The difference is simply that with a horizontal water mill, the paddlewheel is on the bottom, sticking into a running stream, while in a wind mill, the paddlewheel (probably with cloth sails for paddles) sticks up in the air. There are suggestions that horizontal mills appeared as early as 4000 BC (the very end of TL0, although it might be safer to call it an early instance of TL1 technology). The only necessary preexisting technology is the sorts of bearings which would be used on wagon axles.

More sophisticated mills are, of course, a different matter. Vertical mills require solid gearing, which appears to be a TL2 development. The historical obstacle to the adoption of the waterwheel in Europe appears to have been economic rather than technological. Mills require a large capital investment, which seems unnecessary to a society which has plenty of cheap labor. A plague or a series of political events which reduced the slave population of such an empire might cause the widespread adoption of water power in TL2.

Overshot mills, where the water pours over the top of the mill, are twice as efficient as undershot mills. However, it wasn't until the 17th century that anyone came up with a series of tests to determine that that was actually the case. Prior to that time, people usually built whichever type was easier: undershot in flat areas, overshot in hilly regions where it was easier to build a mill race. A time traveler with political influence could subtly increase the amount of industrial power available by requiring that only overshot mills be built.

Vertical windmills require the same kinds of gearing as vertical water-powered mills, plus the conceptual breakthrough that you can get power from drag, not just direct force of wind, which lets you expose the entire wheel to the wind, not just half of it, and get twice as much energy. That wouldn't be too much of a stretch for a society which had developed triangular sails and tacking against the wind. That style of sailing became popular in Europe in the later half of the Middle Ages, predating the first vertical windmills by two or three centuries. However, such sails have a longer history in the Middle East and India, potentially pushing the development of the vertical windmill in such areas back to TL2.

However, the utility of early vertical windmills is limited to places with reliable prevailing winds. They were subject to a variety of improvements to allow the windmill to turn to face shifting winds, adjust pitch to catch the wind more efficiently, and so on. Unfortunately, the steps necessary to thus perfect the windmill require a degree of technical

sophistication which ultimately renders them obsolete; windmills reach a pinnacle of development about the same time as the steam engine becomes feasible. However, on an iron-poor planet where powerful steam engines aren't a possibility, waterwheels and windmills may be the basis of TL 4+n technology.

Steam Engines

This is yet another area in which provocative bits of theory were developed comfortably in advance of practical application. The idea of using the expansive power of steam to push objects goes back at least to Greek philosophers early in TL2 and could easily appear in TL1. By the end of TL2, some people were even doing something about it. Temples and palaces likely used jets of steam to push light, articulated "automata" around from the inside, make musical noises through something like organ pipes, or simply fill buckets with water as a hidden counterweight, making it appear that doors and other objects were moving under their own power. Really, any smith capable of making a good teakettle can build a steam-powered gadget which will spin around when heated or something similarly frivolous.

Unfortunately, bringing that force to bear for useful applications is much harder. Indeed, the first steam engines literally did not rely on the power of steam itself. The first practical steam-related powered devices appearing around 1700 (stationary water pumps developed to pump out flooded mines) relied on the power of a vacuum created by the condensation of steam to pull a piston into a cylinder rather than the force of steam to push it out. Powerful steam engines are very sophisticated machines requiring very strong construction, piston systems which are sufficiently well-sealed that they won't bleed off steam pressure at the expense of power, complex piping to suck every possible calorie of heat and distribute it to various parts of the machine (pre-heating water and keeping the whole machine warm using waste heat improves a steam engine's power and efficiency tremendously), complex valves which will properly and automatically regulate the direction and action of the steam, and all moving parts built to specifications which allow for expansion because of heat.

What all of this means is that, although steam can be applied in some lower-tech situations, real steam power can't be available before TL5. Indeed, the advances required in material science, thermometry, gearing, hydraulics, and other sciences are such that tooling up related technologies to the point where steam engines become a possibility essentially pushes a society into TL 5, at least so far as physical sciences are concerned. So if your steampunk-fantasy dwarves have steam engines, they should probably also have accurate clocks, powered looms, and factories which could out-produce anything operated by races without steam power.

Stirrups

Not invented until the early Middle Ages, the stirrup is perhaps the greatest "whack on the head" invention in history. This simple device, a loop of rope or leather, sometimes with a reinforced bar across the bottom, allows much easier mounting of a horse and allows the rider much greater stability. Careful historical analysis has disproven the old theory that the stirrup led to the development of heavy cavalry and therefore European feudalism, but it doubtless enhanced the power of the feudal knight considerably. The only necessary technology for stirrups is having domesticated riding animals and saddles, a TL1 development. It might not make a big difference in everyday lives (horses are always quite expensive and were far more valuable to the common man as a draft animal than as a riding beast), it would certainly improve heavy cavalry.

Thermometer

One of the biggest obstacles to early chemistry is the lack of tools to measure temperature. The basic idea underlying thermometers, that things can expand or contract depending on their temperature, goes well back into TL2. However, it wasn't until TL4 that instruments taking advantage of that principle were developed and not until TL5 that they were perfected. The most attainable method of measuring temperature is by putting a fluid in a narrow, transparent tube, usually with a bulbous reservoir at one end. As the fluid expands or contracts, the level of the fluid rises or falls, indicating the temperature; the more fluid in the reservoir and the narrower the tube, the more noticeable the change in

level will be.

The main stumbling block here is the narrow, transparent tube. There's no real substitute for glass, and the sort of tube necessary for a thermometer is fairly fine work, requiring a sophisticated level of glass-making technology. Unless an exotic natural substitute becomes available (say, a species of enormous transparent hedgehogs with hollow spines), a useful thermometer of this type can't even be attempted until late in TL3.

There are some other fiddly concerns which will effect the accuracy and usefulness of thermometers: the earliest thermometers used a variety of relatively lightweight fluids (water, wine, etc.) which would respond to temperature changes, but they would also respond to changes in atmospheric pressure, a phenomenon of which early thermometer makers were unaware. The use of mercury, whose density makes it relatively resistant to air pressure changes, isn't obvious, although it would seem to be an appropriate material for an alchemist to experiment with. The durability of the tube will also limit its usefulness. A thin glass tube will suffice to measure the temperature of a bucket of ice water or a boiling pot, but it might break in a hot oven and could even melt if used to monitor the temperature of a blacksmith's furnace or a potter's kiln.

A plausible and quite possibly very early alternative for measuring high temperatures is the bimetallic thermometer. If two strips of different metals are welded together back-to-back and the combined strip is heated, the strip will bend as one side expands faster than the other. A bimetallic strip (or, better still, a long strip bent into a coil; again, the more material, the more visible the changes) could easily be fixed to a scale and its expansion and contraction measured to calibrate it to specific temperature points. This sort of thermometer could be developed as early as TL1, and it's not too hard to develop a scenario for its discovery (for example, a jeweler notices that a half-gold, half-silver piece he's working on flexes when left near a fire then back once it has cooled). The drawbacks of such a thermometer are that it isn't as sensitive as most liquid thermometers nor as useful at lower temperatures and that -- although it's far more durable than a glass thermometer -- it still can't measure temperatures higher than the lower of the melting points of its component metals. A bimetallic thermometer made of, say, gold and silver would disintegrate if placed in a furnace melting down bronze.

Fantasy Campaign Structures

Considering the Shapes of Games

by Phil Masters

GMs are usually, rightly concerned with the *style*, or genre/sub-genre, of the games which they set up. For example, someone running a **GURPS** fantasy game might refer to [GURPS Fantasy](#) and choose between the genres discussed there -- High Fantasy, Low Fantasy, Dark Fantasy, Light Fantasy, or Sword and Sorcery. However, if the campaign is intended to have any sort of grand plot or *structure*, it's worth thinking about the overall shape of the thing. This article looks at some possibilities, with particular reference to fantasy games, although most of the principles apply equally well to other genres.

Note that the structure of the campaign may define an overarching plot, but it's perfectly possible for individual scenarios, run over one or more game sessions, to have their own, quite differently structured plots. Think of them as sub-plots within the grand campaign plot -- or, in television terms, as episodes within the season's plot-arc.

Anyway, some general categories follow . . .

The Picaresque

A picaresque campaign is simple and loosely organized. The characters wander around the countryside, meeting interesting people, admiring nice scenery and weird wonders, and probably getting into occasional fights. It's really a kind of tourism.

This may sound dull, but if the scenery and characters (PCs and NPCs) are interesting enough, a campaign can keep going for months or years on very little more. Picaresque games mostly work best either if they are more or less comic -- the point of all this wandering being actually to find good jokes -- or if the PCs are roving do-gooders (or perhaps petty criminals -- or both, in some proportion), dealing with minor but interesting problems as they go. The picaresque form is a bit too unfocused for most novelists, but TV series about wandering heroes with strong episode plots but weak "season arcs" are effectively picaresque, as are episodic novels such as Terry Pratchett's *The Color of Magic*.

RPG campaigns set in intricate or highly original new worlds may well start off in the picaresque mode, as the players get the hang of all the novelty and admire the creator's ingenuity. Picaresque plots often evolve into something else over time, as the protagonists discover a purpose to their existence, formulate ambitions, or spot a pattern to the problems which they encounter which merits some kind of grand solution.

The Quest

A quest is a journey. It may be simple and linear, or complex, with digressions and diversions; it may be long or short, to a destination which is known or unknown at the start; it may even be partly or entirely spiritual. The point is, though, that characters go from A to B to fetch, discover, destroy, or kill something (or just to get home, as in that archetypal quest, *The Odyssey*), meeting obstructions or secondary objectives along the way. This includes journeys of exploration to distant lands, where the objective is simply to find out about the destination. It's distinguished from the picaresque by the fact of an objective, and hence the potential for completeness, although the protagonists may not know what their objective is to begin with.

Plot Coupons

The concept of the *plot coupon* was invented by critic Nick Lowe; see his article, "[The Well-Tempered Plot Device](#)" (which has several good ideas - or horrible warnings -- for anyone developing a fantasy plot). This is an object which

Quests may be assigned -- the king sends his knights out to find an important artifact -- or they may be forced on characters -- the heroes set out to rescue a friend from captivity in a distant land. They may even emerge gradually in the course of events, as characters who started out as picaresque wanderers realize that there's an important goal to be achieved. Often, at least one of the adventurers is highly motivated by some wish or need, or at least by the offer of a large reward, driving the plot along and keeping the story focused, although others in the party may be more casual hirelings, friends, or thrill-seekers. Of course, these hangers-on, like Bilbo in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, may gain and learn much when the quest is complete.

Quest campaigns have the advantage of clear focus, giving the GM a way to motivate characters and the players the chance to feel that they've achieved something specific at the end. They also generally provide a strong incentive for the party to stick together, although some searches, such as the Arthurian quest for the holy grail, can send individual heroes off in all directions, ending up with much of the scattered, episodic quality of a picaresque. The drawbacks are that quests can seem linear, with arbitrary incidental encounters dotted along the way like hurdles on a race track, and they're usually *finite*, with nothing to do once the prize is won. (Quests which never do reach their end feel dull and pointless after a while.) Good GMing and use of subplots can resolve the first problem, while the second, assuming that the players don't actually want a finite campaign with an end date after which they can play something else, can be resolved by spinning a whole new plot off the end of the quest. This might be *another* quest, but many players might be more satisfied with a change of structure; the heroes might, say, have to manage and govern the lands they've won, or they might become the heroic guardians of their community.

The Heroic Career

This campaign structure works best when there's one PC who everyone is willing to accept as the star of the show, or possibly a closely allied group with similar objectives. It emphasizes the idea of adventuring as a *career*, with the sort of associated life-plan that many well-paid, difficult professions involve, but with more risks and more fame and glory at the end. Alternatively, it may be expressed in more portentous terms; the hero's life may echo legends and myths, or symbolize the path to enlightenment.

To begin with, the protagonists may simply be mercenaries and tomb-robbers, or minor local heroes. They deal with petty monsters and bandit gangs, investigate old ruins in search of treasure, and perhaps resort to a stylish sort of crime if they're not overly moral and circumstances press. Eventually, though, they accumulate enough skill, equipment, and fame that their jobs become a bit more impressive, and take a bit longer; they may be hired to clean out nests of monsters, escort or conduct lengthy expeditions into wilderness areas, and solve the sorts of mystery that require both force and intelligence.

Thus, they can become more proactive as their careers advance. Eventually, they may look to settle down, perhaps taking over or founding a community, or being awarded an important position in a feudal government. By now, they should probably be developing social as well as combat skills, or at least studying strategy as well as swordplay. They may even end up as rulers themselves, or at least champions of their nations and leaders of great armies. Such personal sagas can go on for years of real-world time, and may be hard to end satisfactorily -- unless the players are willing to

the protagonists of the story must search out to accomplish some important goal. For example, it may be the lost crown which the prince must wear in order to claim the vacant throne of the kingdom, or the sword which must be re-forged and given to some hero because it's the only weapon in the world which can slay some particular monster. Everyone insists that the coupon is terribly important, wrapped around with omens and prophecies, but its real function is to make the plot happen by being lost, found, and transported. In many cases (especially big fantasy trilogies and series in which each book is supposed to stand alone if necessary), there are multiple plot coupons, and the heroes must collect a full set and then take them somewhere to win a free denouement.

Plot coupons can be used in RPGs as in novels, for much the same purpose, and they do serve a useful purpose in motivating the PCs to go out on adventures; provided that they agree that the ultimate objective is worth pursuing, chasing a plot coupon can keep them busy for months. However, this may turn the campaign into a sort of fantasy scavenger hunt, and can seem rather artificial; if the players become too conscious of how the GM is running things, they may stop taking it entirely seriously.

have their characters die, perhaps nobly in combat with an evil foe. It's also possible that they'll found a dynasty, and start up a new set of PCs -- the students, courtiers, and heirs of the first group.

The shape of a "classic" heroic career is in fact partly dictated by cultural and literary conventions. In the modern world, and in some lighter fairy stories and such, there's a tendency to expect such a career to end in triumph, with the hero running a country, or at least standing over the bodies of his fallen enemies before he marries the girl and goes home to live in comfort. However, many storytellers have always been aware that life is more complicated than that; stories about mortal lives can only really end in death. Even in the *Arabian Nights*, which is full of wish-fulfillment stories, the tales traditionally end with a formula that says that the hero goes home to live in comfort and happiness for many years . . . until death comes along, as it comes to everyone. Many older heroic myths are more explicitly tragic; the great Celtic hero Cuchulain deliberately chose a short life of warrior glory, and lived with a geas that doomed him to early death, while numerous Greek heroes eventually fell to the flaw of hubris, and were punished by the gods (although some were subsequently taken up to a place on Olympus, in some versions). RPG players will probably prefer something less gloomy -- though some may be interested in recreating some mythic style in every detail -- but GMs who plan to play through a long-term heroic career should decide what to do about heroic mortality.

Resource Management

Some players are born builders. They like finding a place in the game world, and making something of their characters, picking up wealth, power, and allies. The resource management campaign plays to this taste.

While PCs in such a campaign may start without a stated long-term goal, they should soon find one. They might acquire a fief to rule, or one of them might be an ambitious wizard who recruits the others to help him set up his own tower. If they're urban rogues, they might decide that *organized* crime interests them most, and seek to control and expand their city's thieves' guild. In all cases, survival and expansion are both the long-term goal and the chief reward.

In fact, resource management plots are probably more common in RPGs than in fiction. In a novel or movie, they will probably seem rather dull -- there's not much heroic about nit-picking accountancy, even if it's punctuated with battles with monsters -- but gamers, who have a close identification with their characters and often a keen interest in the *game* side of things, can become really interested in the best ways to advance their characters and in intricate problem-solving.

This sort of game can require a fair amount of work from the GM as well as the players, as resources and problems have to be tracked and balanced at every stage. The GM also has to control the flow of resources to the group; too little, and they'll be frustrated by their inability to make progress, too much and these efficient managers will take over too much of the game world and feel insufficiently challenged. Local shortages -- of, say, spell ingredients, or skilled NPC assistance -- or problems such as hostile neighbors can force the resource managers to engage in more traditional short-term adventures, but they'll most likely want to head home and see that everything is going okay immediately afterwards. The group's ultimate aim may be nebulous, but every bit of growth and every bad season survived with minimum casualties counts as a pleasing victory.

GURPS Fantasy has rules and guidelines for many things which may

Maritime Adventures

A whole sub-category of adventure story -- including fantasy adventures -- deals with seafaring action. (A sci-fi equivalent is of course space travel, and countless *Traveller* players can attest how well that can work.) The voyage can become a picaresque adventure or quest, while events on board can include soap opera or even murder mysteries. Sea voyages have a lot to recommend them to GMs; being on a ship means that the party can't split up, while one can use a single "floor plan" for numerous incidents, and control the speed and timing of many events by declaring that the weather has changed, or that the ship needs repairs. Ships alone at sea are also largely immune to interference from social superiors, and make good settings for claustrophobic horror stories and psychological tales of isolation and personal conflict. Sea monsters or enemy ships can make entertaining opponents, and if people get bored, well, the ship can always arrive in an interesting port, or discover a weird little island.

The drawbacks of the form are largely mirror images of the advantages; the party is trapped together, isolated from new social contacts, and at the mercy of

be issues for a resource management campaign. GMs may have to develop details further, though, setting income levels for peasants and hired guards, crop yields for farms, and detailed costs for alchemical components. ***Ars Magica***, by Atlas Games, is one RPG which pays close attention to the sort of details which are crucial to resource management games.

Soap Opera

On the other hand, for players who find that real life provides them with quite enough in the way of management challenges, a looser, personality-driven, soap opera style of game may be the way to go. This is a style for budding amateur thespians; the PCs are motivated simply by being somewhere as a group, interacting with each other and with NPCs. They may well form a community (as in a resource management game) or a traveling party (as in a quest), but the details of survival or the goal of the quest are far less important than the personality interactions along the way. Indeed, growth may seem unimportant, and ultimate goals may be postponed indefinitely.

Real soap opera certainly includes a lot of *short-term* motivations, though; passionate romances and angst-laden tragedies are essential aspects of the form, for at least some characters. A certain willingness to forgive and forget may be useful here; traumas and disagreements which would drive some people apart permanently tend to have only short-term consequences for soap opera casts, although they may generate minor grudges and persistent in-group rivalries. Romantic relationships may blossom and disintegrate repeatedly, to the point where even others in the group begin to make jokes about it. Enmities may be serious, although constrained enough by law, social convention, or shared interests to prevent outright bloodshed, or kept at the level of name-calling and petty sabotage. If the group has serious outside (NPC) enemies, some members may sometimes be tempted to "defect," or to betray the rest for profit or revenge -- although if the group is going to stay together, they should eventually either change their minds, find some way to redeem themselves, or keep their betrayal secret for months or years.

If the players are really committed to the soap opera style, such campaigns may barely need any intervention from the GM -- just the occasional monster to fight or NPC "guest star," and neutral adjudication in conflicts. Other groups engage in soap-operatic play in the background and between scenarios in "quest" or "mystery" games. While some players may hate soap opera, especially if it's overdone, it's certainly something which can make campaigns more colorful and dynamic.

Incidentally, *situation comedy* -- a style of game suitable for settings such as that of [The Discworld Roleplaying Game](#), can be treated, for these purposes, much like soap opera. Again, the trick is to have a group of characters who may or may not like each other much locked into a situation where they have to deal with each other, and then let things run on from there.

Mystery and Law

Any properly developed game world is a complex environment with its own rules, both natural and human-made. Wherever such rules exist, there is scope for mysteries, and for heroes who can resolve them and restore the order of things.

One thing about supernatural fantasy is that infractions of the laws of man and of nature are less distinct than in most worlds. The same characters can find themselves investigating mundane crimes, magical secrets, and metaphysical enigmas. Indeed, which category an incident falls into may be unclear at first; was the locked-room murder committed

the weather and unreliable technology. Ship crews also tend to have quite strong rules, and rigid hierarchies of rank and authority, which some players may find too restrictive. Still, a well-judged mixture of travel, exploration, and "port time" can keep everyone interested.

GMs looking to run maritime adventures need to become at least moderately familiar with the technicalities of the subject -- well enough to bluff convincingly, anyway. A little nautical jargon goes a long way, unless any of the players know it better than the GM, in which case, the GM will probably be well advised to skip over the technicalities. Resource management -- of a short-term, highly specific kind -- can become *extremely* important at sea; GMs can skate over this if they wish, or make it a focus of the campaign.

with a cunning mechanical device, was the victim magically driven to suicide, or was it the work of an intangible demon?

"Sherlock Holmes"-style detective plots can be hard to run in RPGs, but are *not* impossible; see [GURPS Mysteries](#) for extensive guidelines. The main trick is, perhaps, for the GM to have a selection of clues in hand, release them to the PCs when they look in the right places, and permit the occasional Perception or relevant skill roll to earn a useful hint. Eventually, the players (preferably roleplaying bright PCs) should be able to put enough information together to solve the mystery. However, games needn't get this cerebral; PCs who are working as law enforcers or "ghost-busters" may have very little difficulty working out what's going on and who's responsible, the point of the story being dramatic fights or spectacular magical action when they eventually corner the perpetrators.

While many fantasy worlds are a little short on professional mystery-solvers, most have somebody, somewhere, who's responsible for keeping the peace and enforcing law and order, whether it's a city watch, the local magistrate and his hired guards, or simply an "interested amateur." Likewise, priests, shamans, or exorcists may be required to deal with supernatural problems besetting their communities. Nor do fantasy worlds *have* to lack detectives, just because they didn't exist in medieval Europe; Terry Pratchett's "Discworld" novels include a number of "police procedurals" featuring the Ankh-Morpork city watch, and there are several other examples in fiction, such as Randall Garrett's Lord Darcy; Yrth, the world depicted in [GURPS Banestorm](#), has a whole Order of professional "magical detectives," the Michaelites.

War Games

Warfare in a fantasy world tends to be dramatic and unpredictable. It can potentially be just as horrific and messy (and as boring and futile) as it ever is in the real world, but magic and the high-powered heroes are certainly likely to affect the outcome and nature of events, one way or another.

Warfare-based campaigns take their structure from the events of the war itself, or from the nature of military life. PCs can have a chance to dictate, or at least influence, the course of such things if they're sufficiently high-ranking, or if they make themselves strategically important enough; a military campaign can even be one phase of an extended resource management game. ("Warfare is the continuation of politics by other means . . .") Conversely, if the PCs are low-ranking soldiers (or even civilians swept up in events), the whole point of the story may be their general powerlessness (at least until they advance in rank and knowledge), especially in darker, gritty games; plots can resemble a kind of somber soap opera, as the only thing which these ordinary troops can influence directly is the pattern of relationships within their unit.

In most fantasy settings, the basic pattern of military activity is medieval, with muscle-powered weapons, relatively small armies, and moderately mobile forces who nonetheless sometimes become entangled in lengthy sieges of strong fortifications. The presence of magic and some nonhuman creatures on both sides doesn't seem to change this too much; wizards may be dangerous combatants, but apparently, their other abilities make them too valuable to commit to the front lines, they aren't numerous or powerful enough to change large-scale logistics much, and they largely cancel each other out when used for intelligence purposes. Perhaps their most dramatic function is to work with some of those heroic warriors to provide a sort of "special

War on Yrth

Taking *GURPS Banestorm* as an example once again, there's certainly scope for stories about warfare on Yrth. While the continent of Ytarria is *mostly* at peace in the supplement's present day, this wasn't the case quite recently, and things could very easily change again in the near future. The border between Megalos and al-Wazif remains tense, with grudges from the recent conflict still festering, and the prospect of renewed slave raids on both sides likely to trigger local conflicts which could blow up into another war. Caithness is bogged down in an intermittent civil conflict which could flare up into serious battles if either side should see an opportunity; meanwhile, the Megalan border lords are watching this situation and contemplating taking advantage, which might or might not make the lords of Caithness bury their differences.

Tribal skirmishes are a way of life in the Nomad Lands, as are strange and subtle clan conflicts in Sahud. Other Megalan leaders could resurrect the

forces" element.

Quite a few fantasy novels deal with warfare to at least some extent, though most focus on the activities of a few individuals rather than considering the grand sweep of strategy; Tolkien's *The Return of the King* (the third part of *The Lord of the Rings*) is one example, and the film adaptation certainly features some spectacular battle scenes. It's also a useful demonstration of how to link events on the battlefield to the actions of crucial individuals. Terry Pratchett's *Monstrous Regiment* provides an off-beat example of low-ranking, unskilled troops having a surprising effect on the pattern of international conflict.

crazed dream of conquering Bilit Island -- but perhaps the greatest danger in Megalos is the chance that its ruler's depravities or its lords' squabbles could send the whole Empire into civil war, at which its neighbors might contemplate intervention, or be dragged in to protect their borders from the schemes of the participants.

Complex and Mutating Structures

The campaign structures discussed here are useful categories, but they aren't hard-and-fast rules and they aren't meant to straightjacket anyone. In a good game, the shape and limits of the campaign may sometimes be stretched and tested, or the game can transform subtly from one format to another.

For example, picaresque wanderers may eventually find a purpose in life, settle down, and start managing resources, or heroic careers can involve a stint in the army during wartime and then culminate in great quests, or law-enforcement organizations can be the venue for soap opera. (See the comic *Planetary* for a picaresque plot which gels into something else.) Indeed, different players can have different views of the same game; some can be happily managing the resources which others are using as means to an end, or some can see themselves pursuing a "structured" career while others are happily engaging in picaresque tourism. While it's fine for the GM to avoid plots which won't interest the players, it's also fine to run any plot which *will* work for them, whether or not it fits some arbitrary campaign category.

Pyramid Review

Classic Battletech Mercenaries Supplemental 1 (for Battletech)

Published by FanPro LLC

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106-page b&w softcover; \$24.99

FanPro LLC has released another in the long line of works about mercenary units in the *Classic Battletech* universe. What separates *Mercenary Supplemental I* from previous units is it's not simply an update on what's up with the Kell Hounds and Wolf's Dragoons. In fact, as the back cover states, it's a rundown of units who aren't quite up to their caliber. Some of these units have been long-time residents of the *Battletech* universe, have never been detailed in an official publication until now or, if they were, it was a passing mention with little if any detail to help a player figure out what the unit was made up of. Needless to say, this can and did vex many a referee running a Battletech campaign. Happily, FanPro listens to its fanbase, and the first in a series of supplementals addressing this problem was born.

Each unit, like the other entries in the *Battletech Field Manual* series, gets its own one-page entry, describing its own TO & E, officers, personalities, and favored tactics, as well as a description of its history and color scheme. The last point also deserves mention, as the color plates detailing the various unit paint schemes with miniatures near the end of the book are well done, and reason enough to get the book if one wants to build an company or two from one of these units. The book also details alternate hiring halls in the *Classic Battletech* universe, such as long-forgotten Galatea or lesser halls like Northwind. Another nice thing about this book is that there is an alternate point-based system to generate one's own mercenary unit that is a simpler alternative to the system originally presented in *Field Manual: Mercenaries, Revised*. Nice and clear worksheets are also provided to make the process a real snap. I also like how it "ironed out" some of the contradictory canon about the origins of some mercenary outfits in the *Classic Battletech* universe. (Hansen's Roughriders, anyone?)

In a world of \$49.99 gaming books, the price for the book is reasonable, and though the book is soft cover, the presentation is better than some hardcover books in higher price ranges. Also included is some small mood-setting fiction; this is another fine idea FanPro has been doing in its product lines, as it helps set the mood of the books and shows the quality of writing has certainly taken an upswing in *Classic Battletech*.

Things that bother me were again, nitpicky, such as why the color plates were placed where they were in the book, bisecting the last two unit entries, or why, for a book full of "also rans" are there some pretty good units in here? Perhaps some of them could have waited for another supplemental for "good-but-overlooked units." Also curious is the need for six pages of ad filler at the back. I know these companies need to make a buck, but guys, more content could have been added.

What I really like is the commitment FanPro is making to ***Classic Battletech*** through the publication of these books, In 106 pages, they breathed life into a lot of units that had never gotten more than a passing mention in the days under FASA. For that alone, bravo! Though there are some minor flaws, as mentioned above, the book is solidly written and the rules work well for the creation of merc outfits (the reviewer having play tested them himself). Furthermore, many of the unit writeups were imaginative and very well executed, and fit well into the ***Classic Battletech*** universe, even the newer ones, and it was nice to see updates of some old friends from the fiction, such as the Black Thorns and the Northwind Highlanders. All in all, I can say this book is worth the price, especially if you are running a mercenary campaign in the ***Classic Battletech*** universe. FanPro has set a new standard for the writing in the ***Classic Battletech*** line, with its Battlecorps endeavors and now the release of the Historical and Mercenary Supplemental books, and the promise of more on the way. It's obvious that ***Classic Battletech*** is back with a vengeance.

--Jason Reade Weiser

William Dampier, Pirate Scientist

for *GURPS*

by James L. Cambias

William Dampier was probably unique in being the only known pirate scientist. Born in Somerset around 1652, he went to sea, and in 1674 voyaged to Jamaica to manage a sugar plantation. The job didn't agree with him, and Dampier joined the community of illegal English loggers in Campeche. In 1679 Dampier joined a crew of buccaneers for a series of raids on Panama and the Pacific coast of South America. That whetted his appetite, and in 1684 he signed on for a cruise which took him from Virginia around Cape Horn, up the coast of Peru, and across the Pacific to the Philippines. From there Dampier made his way back to England via the East Indies, returning home in 1691. During his pirating voyages Dampier kept careful notes on cultures, animals, plants, and especially wind and weather, which he collected into a book, *A New Voyage Round the World* (1697).

His book won him great acclaim in London, and in 1699 Dampier got a commission from the Royal Navy to take the leaky *HMS Roebuck* on to explore the south Pacific. He reached Australia and cruised along New Guinea and New Britain, but on the return voyage the *Roebuck* got so unsound she had to be abandoned at Ascension Island. Dampier was court-martialed on returning to England; he was acquitted of any fault in the loss of the ship, but complaints about his treatment of the ship's officers led to his removal from the Navy.

As a privateer Dampier accompanied two more voyages, but as pilot rather than commander, and may have been the first person to circle the globe three times. He died about 1715, but where and how are not known.

A lanky, melancholy-eyed Englishman with brown hair, usually dressed in worn sea officer's clothing.

William Dampier **150 points**

ST 11 [10]

DX 11 [20]

IQ 12 [40]

HT 11 [10]

Dmg. 1d-1 thr, 1d+2 sw

Basic Lift: 24 lbs

Hit Points: 11

Will: 12

Per: 14 [10]

FP: 11

Basic Speed: 6 [5]

Basic Move: 6

Home TL: 4

Cultural Familiarity: Western [0]

Languages: English (Native) [0]

Spanish (Accented) [4]

Malay (Broken) [2]

Wealth (Struggling) [-10]

Reputation: Celebrated traveler and naturalist +1 [5]

Reputation: Buccaneer -1 (in Spanish America, sometimes) [-1]

Courtesy Rank 4 ("Captain") [4]
Contact Group: Royal Society (scientists, skill 15) [10]
Cultural Adaptability [10]
Fit [5]
Talent: Mariner 2 [10]

Bully [-10]
Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-10]
Curious [-5]
Greed (15) [-7]

Quirks: Broad-Minded, Minor Obsession: capture a treasure ship, Proud [-3]

Skills:

Area Knowledge (Caribbean) (IQ)-12 [1]
Area Knowledge (Southeast Asia) (IQ)-12 [1]
Astronomy/TL4 (IQ-1)-11 [2]
Brawling (DX+1)-12 [2]
Broadsword (DX+1)-12 [4]
Cartography (IQ)-12 [2]
First Aid/TL4 (IQ)-12 [1]
Geography/TL4 (Pacific) (IQ)-11 [2]
Gunner/TL4 (cannon) (DX+1)-12 [2]
Guns/TL4 (musket) (DX+1)-12 [2]
Mathematics/TL4 (surveying) (IQ)-12 [4]
Meteorology/TL5 (IQ)-13 [1]*
Naturalist (IQ+2)-14 [12]
Navigation/TL4 (sea) (IQ)-15 [4]*
Seamanship/TL4 (IQ)-14 [2]*
Shiphandling/TL4 (ship) (IQ)-14 [4]*
Survival (island/beach) (Per)-13 [1]
Tactics (IQ-2)-10 [1]
Writing (IQ-1)-11 [1]

*Includes bonus from Mariner talent

Equipment: At sea or in exotic ports, Dampier would certainly be armed with a cutlass. In battle he would also carry a musket. On his later voyages he has good-quality navigation instruments -- spyglass, sextant, etc. He always has a notebook, carefully protected from damp.

This represents Dampier about 1692, at the end of his first voyage around the world, when his book *A New Voyage Around the World* was getting him a reputation as a scientist but he was still trying to make his fortune. Before the publication of his book, he has no positive Reputation.

Later in life his Courtesy Rank of Captain becomes genuine Military Rank, then Merchant Rank after his court-martial. During his naval service he gains a Duty to the Royal Navy. His Wealth improves to Average, but he gains the Debt disadvantage to offset it.

Dampier's bullying of those under him includes anyone he thinks is his intellectual inferior. It is entirely verbal, and takes the form of lots of "I told you so" comments and criticism. (What makes Dampier's bullying so intolerable is that he's usually correct.) Though Dampier was married, he spent so much time away from his wife Judith that she counts as neither a Dependent nor an Ally.

New Talent: Mariner

Mariner: Boating, Seamanship, Meteorology, Navigation (sea), Shiphandling (ship). Reaction bonus: sailors and seafarers. 5 points/level.

His Meteorology skill is TL5 (rather than TL4 Weather Sense) because Dampier's discoveries about trade wind patterns formed the basis of scientific meteorology in the Industrial era.

In any Swashbucklers-era campaign, Dampier can turn up as a PC, a useful NPC, or even a villain! His global travels and surprisingly broad set of contacts mean that PCs can encounter Dampier anywhere on Earth and in any setting from Royal Society meetings to pirate taverns in Port Royal. Renamed Dampier-clones can show up in any campaign from the Elizabethan era to the Age of Napoleon.

To make Dampier a better villain, give him the Callous disadvantage and improve his Weath to Comfortable. He can be just a smarter-than-average pirate with a scientific bent, or a Master Villain with a secret island base stocked with clockpunk deathtraps and lethal organisms from around the world.

Alternate Dampiers

A pirate scientist requires a home culture which tolerates piracy yet values scientific inquiry. This opens up a number of possible alternate settings for William Dampier (or thinly-disguised duplicates).

The Mediterranean in the Hellenistic era between the death of Alexander and the rise of Rome is another age with vigorous science and plenty of piracy. Kranos the Sidonian could raid Carthaginian merchants and sail to distant India, then report his findings at the Museum of Alexandria.

Many space opera settings (including the *Traveller* universe) could feature a pirate scientist, possibly one putting aside his buccaneering past to command a scout expedition. A futuristic Dampier might well recruit some of his former pirate comrades for a mission of exploration -- or possibly get some naive scouts involved in a spot of raiding, just to cover the expenses of the voyage.

Infinite Dampier

William Dampier would be a good recruit for the Infinity Patrol, as his wide-ranging habits and keen powers of observation make him uniquely suited to spot Centrum incursions. He would also be good at scouting newly-discovered timelines at TL4 or below.

Of course, Dampier's pirate background would also make him an excellent crosstime criminal. As a swagman or "Time Pirate" he'd be uniquely dangerous because he takes the time to learn about the worlds he visits. Infinity agents might find themselves in the embarrassing position of having to ask a criminal if they can borrow his notes on an unknown world.

Finally, in a crosstime-swashbucklers game, Dampier and a band of comrades might be the first ones to notice that the late 17th century is being invaded by mysterious strangers with advanced technology. If the same mysterious strangers turn up in Cochin China and London's alleys, something big and weird is obviously going on. The Royal Society would naturally want a man with a good mind and a ready cutlass to get to the bottom of it.

Occult Dampier

The historical Dampier was a thoroughgoing skeptic and rationalist, always seeking a natural explanation and showing little patience for superstition. But in a world where magic really works, his curiosity and open-minded interest in exotic cultures could lead him to a unique understanding of the magical world.

While the notion of a pirate-scientist-magician has its appeal, it might be more interesting to keep Dampier as a non-mage, with hard-won Occult and Hidden Lore skills but no spellcasting ability. He could be a foe (or agent) of the Cabal, or a perfect investigator of Caribbean horrors in the "Seas of Daring, Seas of Dread" campaign frame from *GURPS Horror*. Equipped with the right magical items (or recruited from the afterlife), Dampier would be an ideal explorer of the Pearl-Bright Ocean or other exotic reaches of the Inner Realms.

Illuminated Dampier

William Dampier's first two voyages around the world are fairly well-documented in his books and the log of the HMS Roebuck. But his third voyage is almost completely unrecorded. What secret mission did his Masonic Templar masters send him on in 1711? Was he investigating the machinations of Shangri-La in southeast Asia? Or looking for the minions of Cthulhu or the Bermuda Triangle in the "Devil's Sea" south of Japan? The fact that Dampier's death and burial place are also undocumented suggests that his Secret Masters may have rewarded his loyal service with a new identity and a comfortable retirement.

Upgrades

For a more cinematic, swashbuckling William Dampier, increase his DX to 12, and add the advantages Combat Reflexes, Unfazeable, and Versatile. In settings with nonhuman aliens, his Broad-Mindedness might increase to Xenophilia.

Taboo or Not Taboo

I'm reluctant to write this column, since I'm afraid of it becoming perceived as my "Steven wonders what's so wrong about marrying your mother" column, but what the heck.

Anyway, I don't remember the exact circumstances why I started thinking about taboos. Perhaps it was attempting to think of how I was going to show off the fact that I was wearing the underwear that my World Yo-Yo Contest coworkers had adhered the iron-on contest patches (complete with "[Bandwidth Exceeded](#)" on the sides and "Staff" on the front), and I recalled my nudity taboos. Perhaps it was a coworker discussing his irritable bowel movement problem. Perhaps it was watching the *Mystery Science Theater 3000: Revenge of the Creature* episode, where it seems a woman is undressing seductively for a dog, and one of the comments is, "What is a taboo, really?"

Or perhaps it was inspired by the recent bruhaha over ***Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*** and its hidden sexual content. (For some reason American society believes it's okay for 15-year-olds to pretend to be drug-dealing, pimping, cop-killing car thieves, but it's not okay for them to pretend to have sex. This is despite the fact that it's been scientifically proven that well over 67% of all people have been a byproduct of sexual contact, and that only one of the aforementioned activities will actually be legal for most 15-year-olds to do 1,096 days after purchasing the game. But I digress.)

Regardless, the thought got on my mind somehow, and it seems like as good an excuse as any to try to crank out a column. And it allows me to write off my Milton Bradley ***Taboo*** game on my taxes.

Anyway, taboos are interesting, because they aren't just things of which society doesn't approve. They're things of which society doesn't approve but *doesn't talk about*. In fact, the non-approval thing isn't even required . . . it could just be things they don't want to talk about period. Oh, and every society has them. Thus while, say, jaywalking, tax evasion, or even murder are all illegal, people still talk about them . . . often just to talk about the fact they're illegal, but sometimes to comment on whether or not they should be illegal. Compare this with, say, graphic depictions of bodily excretions on American television. They're illegal, despite the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, everyone excretes.

Anyway, every culture has taboos. I'd considered trying to deconstruct why that is, but it turns out that I don't know a lick about the subject, and the [Wikipedia article](#) I'd consulted originally summed up that some stranger out there knows more about the subject than I do, so I can include a link to them and be done with it.

What's interesting from a gaming standpoint, however, is that taboo subjects are almost tailor-made for gaming potential. They usually involve roleplaying and conflict, and they apply to everyone interacting with that culture. Perhaps the only downside is that the only way to work taboos into most games is to mention them in relation to taboos that gamers have in common, and . . . well, they wouldn't be taboo if they could be talked about.

But here at the Random Thought Table Institute of Contractually Mandated Word Count, that's never stopped us before, so let's press on with some ready-for-gaming examples. Suppose a culture believes that the dream world is of at least an equal importance as the waking one. Such a society might come to view any unnatural waking of a person to be taboo. Such a society would probably develop very alien habits (such as a couple sleeping in shifts around the birth of a new child, lest the infant's crying awaken the sleeping partner). However, hilarity could ensue if, say, the PCs woke up the town. This might be by accident, because of a pitched battle or other din; or because they felt it was the best course of action, such as the event of a fire. ("What, were we supposed to let you all sleep and be eaten by the dragon?!" "You would save our bodies by killing our dreamselves?!? *Get out of our village!*") Or, if the PCs know about a taboo ahead of time, an otherwise mundane adventure can be spiced up with the existence of such a cultural restriction; sure, stopping a raging fire would normally be easy for the heroes, but can they do it as quietly as possible, lest they gravely offend a politically important village?

More potential can be eked from taboos if two can somehow be brought into conflict. For example, much of the Western world finds the notion of marrying a first cousin to be taboo. However, it's a relatively established tradition in

other cultures, and it's easy to envision a society where the notion of *not* marrying a first cousin would be taboo. If a group of gamerly heroes was called to stand watch over such a wedding, they may feel squeamish . . . and even more so if their characters' roles are expected to officiate or sanction the marriage. (For what it's worth, science has determined that first cousin marriages are much less likely to have genetic abnormalities than previously thought. Of course, I'm not even sure if I *have* any first cousins, so it's nothing more than an academic issue for me.) Or perhaps one PC believes cannibalism -- the eating of human flesh -- to be a grave offense, while another believes that a deceased's soul can be assumed by eating his liver; these two would come in direct -- and interesting -- conflict if a companion or friend were to fall, and the latter was afraid of the dead's soul would be wasted and wink out of existence if not consumed.

Or, as another example, consider M. Night Shyamalan's *The Village* which takes place in [SPOILER ALERT!] a village. [END SPOILER ALERT] The people in this place view the color red as a dangerous, taboo color; although it was never mentioned in the movie, upon watching it I was curious how such a cultural restriction made their women feel every month, and whether such a taboo strengthened or merely explained (for them) the society's normal squeamishness in talking about women's cycles.

When designing a new culture or organization -- either for players or NPCs -- one fruitful avenue can be to work out what their unusual taboos are (feeling free to assume the baseline obvious ones that most cultures find repugnant). Ideally, players can work these out with the GM ahead of time for their characters, so that the other players don't know what a PC's restrictions are; then, when they come up, the players can all fully enjoy the one character's discomfort, since part of what makes a taboo taboo is not being able to talk about it very well. ("What is it, Roalf? Do you not like to hear men singing? Do you disapprove of their robes? Is it the fact that two brothers are singing together? . . .")

Although the goal isn't to make the players uncomfortable, making the characters uncomfortable is all jolly good fun. And hopefully the players will enjoy themselves, even if they don't feel comfortable talking about it.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

The World of Darkness Storytelling System Rulebook

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

Written by Bill Bridges, Rick Chillot, Ken Cliffe, & Mike Lee

Illustrated by Thorn Ang, Sam Araya, Tim Bradstreet, Jeremy Jarvis, Becky Jollensten, Michael Kaluta, David Leri, Jason Manley, Mark Nelson, Jean-Sebastien Rossbach, Greg Ruth, Christopher Shy, Durwin Talon, Josh Timbrook, & Jamie Tolugson

226-Page Black & White Hardback; \$20

The World of Darkness is dead. The setting that spawned a handful or two of RPGs, made roleplaying cool, and in the "live" versions made it really hip, is no more. White Wolf began the process with [Gehenna](#) and continued through the other *Time of Judgement* titles. Of course, this was not a case of pulling of the plug, but a mere click of the reset switch.

Thus it returns, this time in a "One book to rule them, and in the World of Darkness bind them" format. *The World of Darkness Storytelling System Rulebook* provides the mechanical nuts and bolts along with a little philosophical musing that together underpins all future releases, beginning with *Vampire: the Requiem* and followed by *Werewolf: The Forsaken* and *Mage: The Awakening*.

Presented in an attractive dark blue hardback, the rules for the new World of Darkness are not wholly new, but drawn from previous iterations, including *Vampire Revised* and [Adventure!](#) They are clearly written and explained, and the overall impression is that this volume allows the rules space to breathe and exist on their own away from the heavy supernatural elements of previous versions. For the most part, the book is attractively illustrated, the many pieces contributing to the subtle sense of foreboding that hints at the horrors lurking out there. What is very obvious is the effort made to make the book easy-to-use and there are none of the editorial errors present that marred previous books.

The first changes come with character generation. Characters are still defined by nine attributes divided into three categories, Mental, Physical, and Social, further divided into three different applications: Power, Finesse, or Resistance. This is reminiscent of the original *DC Heroes RPG*, so for Physical attributes, the Strength attribute corresponds to the Power use, Dexterity to the Finesse use, and Stamina the Resistance use. Physical attributes remain unchanged, but under the Mental attributes, Resolve replaces Perception, while Presence and Composure replace Appearance and Charisma. A player still needs to prioritize the attributes, but has fewer points to assign to reflect the fact that a character is merely mortal and not a supernatural creature.

Likewise, a player has fewer points to assign to skills, but there are actually fewer skills anyway. Skills are categorized like attributes -- Mental, Physical, and Social -- replacing the previous Talents, Skills, and Knowledges. Variety is added by assigning three specialities to skills, each of which gives an extra dot to the skill. In addition, seven points are spent on Merits, a mixture of previous rules' Backgrounds, plus more extensive training and innate abilities. The most notable changes include making languages an expensive Merit that need to be bought in terms of fluency; and martial art fighting styles, like boxing and kung fu purchased as maneuvers. The other advantage to the fighting styles is that they enable multiple actions in combat, which are otherwise forbidden. The Merits are generally mundane and expensive, and some like Strong Back and Strong Lungs are of relatively little use. Players will probably appreciate

that many Merits can be purchased later on with Experience Points.

Another change is the replacement of the Nature and Demeanor method of handling character personality with the Virtue and Vice system. Each character possesses one of the seven Deadly Sins and the seven major Virtues, very much in the Western tradition. Hopefully a future supplement will explore other traditions, but they are more easily grasped and played than the previous Natures and Demeanors. Similarly though, by playing to either his Virtue or Vice, a character can regain a measure of his Willpower.

What the rules define as Advantages are better described as derived traits. Both Virtue and vice are among them, but the others are Defense, Health, Initiative, Morality, Size, Speed, and Willpower. Perhaps the most interesting of these is Morality. Other games set in the World of Darkness will call this something else -- for example, it is called Humanity in *Vampire: The Requiem*, Harmony in *Werewolf: The Forsaken*, and possibly Hubris for *Mage: The Awakening*. For the mere mortal, Morality represents a measure of his compassion for others and respect for the rule of law. It can be lost by committing immoral acts, which not only lowers a character's moral standards, it also increases the chances of him acquiring a derangement, such as depression, hysteria, or paranoia. A derangement can be lost if a character improves his Morality and even reacquired if it again drops.

Another notable omission is that of Freebie points, which previously allowed a player to buy anything else for his character. Characters have just what they are given, nor can they gain extra points by picking Flaws as in the old Merits and Flaws system. Flaws are present, but only as an option, and a character can only have the one. Rather than providing points to spend, a Flaw rewards a player with extra Experience Points when the Flaw comes into play during a game.

Mechanically, the Storytelling System still employs dice pools. Ten-sided dice are rolled, with results of eight and above being considered a success, and rolls of ten allowing further rolls. The value of successes never changes, but the size of the dice pool does. From a core pool equal to attribute plus skill, dice are added or lost depending upon circumstances and equipment used. Indeed, no little space is spent going over the bonuses an item of equipment imparts, including (for example) the right clothes, a good pick-up line, and so on for the Seduction skill.

Also lost, are rules for rolling a "Botch." Rolls of one do not negate success rolls, and the only chance of dramatic failure occurs when a dice pool is reduced to a single die or less. A single die is still rolled, but as a "Chance" roll, only a straight result of ten succeeds, while a result of one still results in a dramatic failure.

Combat has been radically excised, stripping out the previous system of multiple rolls to handle combat to just a single roll in most cases. Initiative rolls last for a whole combat scene, and attacks work like standard rolls: attribute plus skill, with modifiers for an opponent's armor and Defense value, as well as the expected ones. The number of successes rolled translates to the damage inflicted and deducted from a character's Health. Under previous versions of the rules, a Soak roll might have negated some of this damage, but the new rules loses this, resulting in a combat system that is not only quicker, but potentially far more deadly.

One curiosity is that weapons increase an attacker's dice pool, and while this is clearly designed to reflect the increased damage, say, an Ax (curiously spelt without the "e") can inflict, it has the side effect of enhancing a character's chance to hit. One way to overcome this wrinkle in the rules would to roll the bonus dice after a character has successfully hit as purely damage dice, though this adds another dice roll to what is intended to be a slick system. Firearms work slightly differently in that they ignore a character's Defense trait, making them correspondingly more lethal, and while armor provides some protection, the best options are either to find cover fast, or shoot first.

The rules cover all of the situations that you would expect a modern horror RPG to deal with, including damaging objects, handling car chases, and so on. It does not as such handle insanity caused by external outré threats as do other RPGs, but this reflects more the internal and personal nature of the horror in the *World of Darkness*. Actual advice on running the game is not new, but is at least well-explained.

The nature of the World of Darkness is explored at length, but not really in depth, more hinting at things. It is a dangerous and depressing place, and on the fringes might lurk "something," hints of which comes through the color fiction. The nearest it gets to a supernatural protagonist is one or two types of ghost, useful at least to get a game going

along with several other ideas. It would be easy enough to adapt threats from other sources beyond the simple ghost.

As a generic horror RPG, ***The World of Darkness Storytelling System Rulebook*** is lacking in terms of setting and protagonists. But in laying down the basic rules and mechanics for the rest of the ***World of Darkness*** titles to come, it succeeds in presenting them in a clear and lucid fashion. Diehard devotees of previous versions of the rules will probably find much here to dislike and grumble at, but streamlined and given room to breath in a book of their own, the new ***World of Darkness Storytelling System*** feels easier and less obtrusive.

--*Matthew Pook*

Eihort: Lord of the Primal Labyrinth

Re-Imagining a Great Old One for *Call of Cthulhu*

by J. Edward Tremlett

"Dr. Allred was, at 29 years old, an utterly brilliant mathematician. He had stunned his older colleagues at M.I.T. with tantalizing new ideas in geometry. The final proofs were decades away, of course, but they said he was making 'amazing' progress.

"They also said he was making them uneasy with his increasingly odd behavior. When he wasn't feverishly working on his ideas in his office he was ranting and raving. He threw objects around his room, and walked in endless, unseen patterns while 'thinking aloud.' All his chalkboards were filled with seemingly-nonsensical digressions, but Allred insisted that they tied into his theories -- he just needed more time to prove it.

"He never got that time. After he didn't show up at work for two days in a row, they found him dead at home -- slumped over the desk in his study. A heart attack or an embolism brought by stress, we thought. Perhaps a tumor.

"But when we opened him up on the autopsy table, we found that his skull was perfectly hollow: his brain had simply vanished . . . "

In ["Still Calling After All of These Years,"](#) I suggested that one way to keep *Call of Cthulhu* interesting to veteran players was to never let the "big guns" be *seen* -- only felt. This not only amplifies the mystery and fear of the "keystone" entities of the game, but allows lesser-known creatures to get their due. I also suggested taking established creatures and shaking them up to keep players guessing.

Those ideas in mind, I've reworked one of the Great Old Ones: the subterranean bulk known as Eihort. As written, this English GOO is pretty pointless, as its only real use is to make friends and acquaintances go insane, and then die a gross and messy death. Eihort may underline the idea that you shouldn't call up what you can't put down, but that can also be said of any entity with a deadly attack of 85% or more.

Hopefully, this redoing of the Great Old One will provide a more compelling reason for it to exist within the Mythos. Changes to its stats have been noted, and its new abilities and weaknesses are highlighted. There are also a number of Scenario Seeds at the end, and links to pages of interest.

All page number references are for *Call of Cthulhu ed. 5.5*, unless otherwise noted.

Myth

To those who seek it, Eihort is called The Lord of the Primal Labyrinth, the Walker of the Sacred Roads, and The Invisible Fire That Works In Secret. Some equate it with the Greek notion of the Eidolon: the "higher" consciousness within us all. Others believe that it is one of the Angels, given how it appears in its natural state, or one of the Gods of Wisdom of ancient Egypt, Greece, or Rome.

Eihort is sought by scholars who desire knowledge beyond the scope of current learning: those who are tantalized with visions of possibility, but cannot make them happen. It is said that those who seek it will not find it, but those who earnestly seek *truth* will attract its attentions. And these earnest petitioners can make a Bargain with Eihort, and be shown the way to their dreams . . .

They also say that Eihort is a monster: a large, grublike creature that dwells under the Brichester Labyrinth, in England's Severn Valley. To call on it is to become its mate, and to mate with Eihort is to be filled with millions of its

eggs.

After a year of insane dreams and ravings, the eggs hatch. A host of squirming, white grubs pour out of the monster's lover, leaving behind an empty bag of skin and bones. And the brood then dig down into the earth, seeking to rejoin their creator in its burrow.

Truth

Eihort is a massively-powerful, ethereal thought-parasite. As an immortal, alien creature, it is grouped with the Great Old Ones. But it is unique among its "brothers" in that has no real body, and exists only within the groupmind created by humanity. In that sense, the Great Old One really *is* The Lord of the Primal Labyrinth: the human mind.

It has been within Humanity since the dawn of our race. The creature lives inside the pulse of human thought, both everywhere and nowhere, and is kept alive by the emotional and mental wavelengths that reverberate within.

Its reach may even extend beyond Earth, as any sentient being with the capability of imagination could be linked to it by their brain, or whatever organ passes for one. It could also be confined (imprisoned?) on this planet, like so many of its "brothers." But then, given its near-lack of imagination, it may simply have no thoughts of reaching outside this world.

Appearance

Eihort has two descriptions. One is an ethereal, almost angelic presence, composed of "burning wheels, white angel's wings and wise, ancient eyes." The other is an off-white and maggoty bulk that is ringed with stubby legs, and has cluster of black eyes at the "front." Lipless, sucking "mouths" occasionally open and close on its body, but not to speak -- only to suck, paralyze, pull in, and crush the unfortunate.

Both descriptions are accurate. The former is how Eihort appears in its natural environment of the groupmind, and how it prefers to reveal itself to humans -- knowing full well that it will awe and mystify them. it can take other, more "human" appearances as well, often posing as a god or goddess of wisdom when it does.

The physical form is not mutable: Eihort must assume it when it folds itself down into the physical world. The only time Eihort does this is if a litter of its brood is being purposefully destroyed, or if someone is destroying a True Labyrinth (see below).

Eihort's voice has been described as a fatherly, wise-sounding chorus, or a host of angels speaking as one. When it speaks to a supplicant, or potential Bargainer, it is the quintessence of comforting philosophers. And when it screams in rage, human minds are stomped flat.

Behavior

The creature is something of a paradox: while Eihort lives off the imagination of others, and is highly intelligent, it has very little imagination of its own.

In general, it's content to simply survive, using its vantage point to watch Humanity as they stumble forward to their date with cosmic doom. it *does*, however, contain a degree of emotion which we might call "selfishness," which could explain its interactions with Humanity.

Eihort can observe individual minds, but does not usually think to do so. However, theoretical explorations of the physical world are like nectar to it, and those minds which take mathematics, geometry, physics, and other such fields as far as they can go -- and then beyond that limit -- attract its baleful gaze.

Once these visionaries' great ideas force Eihort to recognize its own lack of imagination, it covets what they have, and

seeks to add it to itself. Such worthy individuals are visited by Eihort in their dreams, and given small visions of the ideas that yet elude them (SAN Loss 0/1).

If the individuals never go anywhere with these alien ideas, then Eihort soon forgets them, and turns its attentions elsewhere. But if they can take their current researches up toward the ideas it gave them, Eihort deems them worthy of its Bargain.

It appears to these worthies in a more potent dream (SAN Loss 1/1d3), and gives them the clues needed to make direct contact with it. This leads them to the creation of a True Labyrinth (see below), and an ethereal audience with Eihort, where it makes the offer.

Eihort appears in its ethereal form, and identifies itself as the truth the person has sought (and the author of his visions, if he's had them). It then asks if he considers himself worthy of seeing more, and would enter its Bargain freely.

Those who refuse are sucked dry of their drive and imagination by Eihort's Scream, and exist thereafter as brain-dead shells. Those who accept its Bargain are implanted with its Brood: small congealed pieces of Eihort which are psychically injected into the Pilgrim's brain.

The Brood act both as additional nodes of thought for the "pupil," and a direct line to Eihort. The Great Old One basks in the increased brainwaves its new, altered pupil puts out -- not really caring that the human brain was not meant to operate with piece of an alien god inside it.

When the pupil begins to crack under the mental strain, Eihort "pacifies" her with a flood of new revelations (SAN Loss 1d3/1d8). When the pupil begins to go mad from the flood of alien ideas, Eihort reaches a point of sheer ecstasy.

And when the pupil finally loses control of her mind, and dies, the Brood come forth . . .

The True Labyrinth

Much as Eihort has been with humanity since its beginnings, so have Labyrinths. The earliest examples come from Greek and Roman antiquity, but labyrinthine structures have been found all over the world, and used by many cultures as engines of spiritual transcendence. For untold ages, Pilgrims seeking understanding have walked them, seeking the connection between the physical and supernatural worlds via their arcane mathematics, or sacred geometry.

Labyrinths are also a means by which to directly interact with Eihort, as it *is* the Lord of the Primal Labyrinth. Doing this requires the construction of a True Labyrinth: a structure dedicated to Eihort (See Spells, below).

Once finished, a True Labyrinth looks like any other, but the difference is made clear when its paths are walked by a person who knows how to use it. The Pilgrim must walk (and *never* run) those paths with the utmost concentration, speaking one of the secret names of Eihort with each step. And as he ventures deeper towards the goal, he sees the Labyrinth's lines waver and shift in their position, as what is outside the outer wall becomes hazy and indistinct.

This distortion increases the deeper one goes in, until the lines are seen to overlap one another, and what is outside cannot be seen at all. Meanwhile, those outside find the Pilgrim hard to focus upon, as though he was a mirage . . .

Once the Pilgrim reaches the goal, in the center, the Pilgrim is seen to disappear. For him, however, the Labyrinth turns itself inside out, he loses one Magic Point, and finds himself in another maze -- the folds of his own brain, lit up with pulsing synaptic fire. (SAN Loss 1/1d3 to have it happen, or 1d3/1d8 if he realizes where he is.)

The Pilgrim must then wander the primal labyrinth of his own mind for 1d4 hours, free from the constraints of gravity and oxygen, until Eihort can find her.

Eihort's Bargain, and Brood

Those pupils who make the Bargain with Eihort are given a singular boon: the Brood of the Great Old One are implanted within their brains, increasing their Intelligence by 1 for each Brood that Eihort chooses to give (between 1d6 and 2d4, depending on reasons known only to it).

The pupils also receive personal interest points equal to 10 times the extra INT they have just acquired. These points must be placed in the Skills that attracted Eihort to them, and may take the pupil's score past 100%. (If it takes it past 90%, they do *not* get a SAN increase).

This increase in their Intelligence is not without cost: the Brood are unstable, alien things, and their presence inside the brain leads to insanity and death. Every 28 days after the Bargain is made, the Brood try to replicate themselves, and the pupil must roll her POW against her new INT on the Resistance Table to stop them.

If her POW wins, she loses 1/1d4 SAN, but keeps the Brood from dividing. If her INT wins, however, 1d3 more Brood come into being, along with more INT and Interest Points. However, she loses 1d4/1d8 SAN from the visions the new Brood give her, and she takes 1d3 CON and 1d3 Hit Points of damage due to the brain damage that's caused.

The Brood are kind enough to repair the Hit Points from brainbleed and the like, but the CON is gone for good. And if the pupil is foolish enough to call on Eihort for help, it just floods her with more visions of the unattainable, costing her 1d3/1d8 SAN per revelation.

This state of affairs continues until the pupil either goes Permanently Insane, loses all CON, or dies from Hit Point loss. When this happens, the Brood devour the brain, and engage in rapid division. The swarm of creatures -- numbering into the hundreds -- then exit the skull en masse (SAN Loss to see this happen is 1d4/1d8) and trundle off in an exodus of bloated, white spiderthings.

This new Brood swarm may go back to join Eihort via the nearest True Labyrinth, or else mimic a human form to lead others to Eihort. The best way to represent these latter creatures, made of swarming Brood in a human shape, is to use the stats for Crawling Ones (***Creature Companion***, pp. 17 -- 18). Unlike Crawling Ones, the Brood can speak -- in a strange, sibilant chorus -- and gnaw flesh down to the bone in minutes if left with an immobile target.

There's always a chance that a few of the Brood might retain strong traces of the pupil's personality. These "Rogue Brood" are often swarmed over and eaten by their littermates, who don't tolerate dissent in their private Groupmind. But if these Rogues can get away from the crowd, it is possible for them to find a kindred spirit and latch onto him, thus escaping Eihort forever.

The Rogue creature touches the human, turns itself into a thought, and slides into her mind. Pieces of the Brood's memories, ideas, intelligence and personality are woven into her thoughts, and the Brood ceases to exist as an individual, sentient being. Over time, the fragments of the person's life will tumble loose in the mind, causing new quirks and talents to manifest. Memories will most likely be passed off as imaginings, though.

Discovering the Lord

The following items and books contain clues by which Eihort can be discovered. Keepers are, as always, free to invent more.

Unausprechlichen Kulte (Nameless Cults)

One of the chapters in Von Junzt's infamous book speaks of a secretive brotherhood of "men of great mathematical achievement" in Paris, France. They called themselves the "Seekers of Hidden Learning" and claimed to be part of an unbroken line of Seekers, going all the way back to Classical Greece.

The Seekers walked the labyrinths of the French Cathedrals as pilgrimage to the Eidolon: embodied as a translucent angel with many wings. They claimed

Revelations of Glaaki

Volume 4 of both the original and published version of this Mythos Tome are said to contain the straight dope on Eihort, including the spell to

that they could call upon it in lucid dreams, and speak to it for guidance, but also knew a way to *visit* the Eidolon. (Von Junzt made a copy of their instructions before fleeing the cult.)

The original, German version and Bridewell English translation of the book have information on the Seekers, and the spells "Seek the Eidolon" (Contact Deity -- Eihort), and "Walk of Truth" (Create True Labyrinth). The Golden Goblyn edition has the information, but only descriptions of the spells. (Stats for all editions are on pg. 88.)

Contact him. I don't like the way that "Revelations" winds up being a one-stop shop for all of Ramsey Campbell's monsters, though, and have limited it to information about Glaaki, and that GOO's relations with others of its kind. Feel free to ignore my moldy-fig revisionism, though.

We Pass From View

This hard-to-find, vanity press book (The Light Press, 1964) contains the metaphysical ramblings of the late Roland Franklyn -- leader of a small ecstatic cult in Brichester, England. Eihort is mentioned by name, and placed within a framework of "higher presences" that reads like a dope-fiend magician's eclectic mishmash of pantheons.

Franklyn's intriguing views on simultaneous reincarnation are most likely sparked by rogue Brood latching onto a kindred spirit. His views on needing to cremate a body to achieve reincarnation, so as to avoid being eaten by Eihort's Brood, are false, as is most of the information it has about Eihort -- past its being Lord of the Primal Labyrinth.

We Pass From View **does** contain the secret names of Eihort, but they're hopelessly scattered throughout the other "higher presences." It also has the "Call Eihort" (Contact Deity -- Eihort) spell.

San Loss is 1d3/1d6, +2 Cthulhu Mythos, two weeks to study and comprehend.

The Pylos Tablet

The earliest record of Labyrinths comes from inscriptions on a clay tablet, found near Pylos, Greece and dated to around 1200 BCE. The tablet was shattered into fragments, and had to be painstakingly reconstructed. Once it was, the inscriptions could be read, but while the words are understood, their meanings have yet to be satisfactorily explained.

In fact, those words are the secret names of Eihort, along with a promise of "great wisdom" to those who seek it out. Anyone who looks at a decent photograph of the tablet -- or sees it where it rests, in the back room of a decrepit museum in Athens, Greece -- can learn the "Contact Deity -- Eihort" spell.

San Loss 1/1d3, +1 Cthulhu Mythos, and it can be read and understood in a day so long as one makes a Read/Write Ancient Greek roll.

Statistics

Eihort's physical form -- an echo of a monstrous, walking brain -- is as described in *Call of Cthulhu*, pp. 165-166. Its Sanity Loss, Weapons, and Armor are still valid, but note that it will not implant its brood into anyone while physical, nor make its Scream attack. It will Crush or Bite foes, instead.

Any who are Bitten -- and paralyzed by the neurotoxin it drools from its mouths -- will be sucked into the beast within one round. Once inside, they will be Crushed for 5d6 damage, and then have their pulverized remains geysered out of a "blowhole" on its top. (1d3/1d8 San to be covered in the still-steaming, mostly-liquid remains of a companion.)

If brought to zero hit points, Eihort silently fades away like mist. It cannot return to the world for 28 days, even if it takes a new "pupil" in that time. By the time the ban is lifted, it will most likely have forgotten the Investigators, unless they've used the time to hurt it even more.

When in ethereal form, inside the groupmind, Eihort has the same physical stats. However, it can only be harmed by

magical means while there. If reduced to zero Hit Points, it fades away, and the supplicant either wakes up from his dream, or comes back to the center of the True Labyrinth.

While ethereal, Eihort can only attack by Spells, or Screaming. It could also assume a shape that would cause San Loss, but doesn't often think to do this, due to its near-lack of imagination. Maximum San Loss is 1d6/1d20, just like its physical form.

To Scream, Eihort uses its Groupmind connection to the victim to suck the creativity and drive out of his brain. The "scream" is actually the cacophony of thoughts and ideas being ripped from a human mind, swirled around and then sucked into Eihort.

Eihort spends one MP to Scream, and pits its POW of 30 against the POW of the victim on the Resistance Table. If it wins it does 1d3 points of INT damage. If the victim wins, she retains hold of her thoughts. The INT damage is permanent.

Once it starts to Scream, Eihort does not stop until the victim is bled dry of INT. Such unfortunates are vegetables, stuck their own minds, with their brains left flat and featureless by the ordeal.

Spells

Balk Brood works as described on pg. 192. If Eihort does appear, it explodes out of the skull of the person who made the Bargain, taking the physical form described on pp. 165-166 (with attendant Sanity Loss) to attack. This, of course, kills the patient.

Contact Deity -- Eihort works mostly as described on pg. 200, with the exception that Eihort will *never* appear physically, but in a dream.

Create True Labyrinth: (*New Spell*) The means by which one may "physically" visit Eihort, this requires that the caster make the Labyrinth under the Gibbous Moon, constantly repeating the secret names of Eihort while working. it doesn't *have* to be done in one night, but work can only be done on it during that phase of the Moon. At the completion, the caster sacrifices 1 POW, dedicating the structure to Eihort.

The Labyrinth can be as simple as lines drawn on the ground with a sharp stick, or as ornate as a modern building. So long as the structure is relatively intact, Pilgrims need only walk it, whispering the many secret names of Eihort as they go. And they will -- with the expenditure of 1 MP -- visit the GOO within their own minds once they reach the center.

Adventure Seeds

The Brichester Labyrinth

It's no accident that there's a Labyrinth in the same town Roland Franklyn's small cult came from. Brichester was once home to a group like Paris' Seekers of Hidden Learning. They built a True Labyrinth there, and walked it often.

The nameless group collapsed some time before Franklyn was even born: the Bargain took them, one by one. Their records and notes were scattered, some winding up in Brichester University.

In the 1960's, Franklyn -- who briefly attended studies there -- stole those records, along with a few other occult books. He used this information to write his book and form his cult, and things went from there.

The Labyrinth sits on a hill a mile outside of town. Its walls were made of small, fist-sized rocks laid down in circular paths, but neglect has rendered the structure impotent. It could be put True once more with a single night's work, though . . .

Eihort Online:

Labyrinths have a nearly-universal attraction, and in these days of "new age" thinking, they are seen as a means to improve the mind and purify the soul. The latest innovation is to make virtual labyrinths, in which Pilgrims follow a graphics program, or other means, to "travel without moving."

It wouldn't be too difficult for someone to program a True Labyrinth. Anyone who wanted to meet up with Eihort would need only to follow it while thinking the names of the Great Old One. They would seem to vanish right in front of their computer, and come right back once the Bargain was made . . .

The French Connection

France holds a place of distinction among Labyrinth enthusiasts, due to the number of Labyrinths in its Cathedrals. Chartres, St. Omer, Amiens, St. Quentin, and Bayeux all have Medieval Labyrinths in them. And Pilgrims still walk those sacred roads, just as the Seekers of Hidden Learning did.

But are the Seekers still around, wandering those Labyrinths as homage to the Eidolon? Are they still willing to let in outsiders after the betrayal of Von Junzt? And does one or more of the Cathedrals of France have a True Labyrinth within it . . . ?

The Seeker in the Shadows

Investigators hear of a club of architects who meet at the New Moon. The club is run by a masked figure, who is rightly called "Genius," as he (or she) seems to know things well beyond current understanding.

It turns out the Genius is a Brood swarm that has assumed human form, and is bringing pupils to Eihort, one Bargain at a time. But what on Earth could these compromised architects be building . . . ?

Links

- [The Labyrinth Society -- http://www.labyrinthociety.org/](http://www.labyrinthociety.org/) -- An excellent page with illustrations and photos of Labyrinths around the world, including the ones in France
- [Suppressed Transmission: Plumb Weird: Sacred Geometry](#) -- A masterful look at Sacred Geometry, full of history, connections, and ideas to exploit.

Invitation to the Dance

by William H. Stoddard

One thing many roleplayers think of trying, at one time or another, is encounters or scenarios focused on social interaction rather than combat. Some players want to try characters who are better at persuasion than fighting: bards, courtesans, diplomats, lawyers, or merchants, for example. And some game masters would like to see how all the characters, including the absent-minded wizards and the strong, silent warriors, cope with social interaction.

But running scenes of social interaction can have problems. The natural thing to do is tell the players, "Just . . . you know . . . roleplay." Everyone can talk, after all, and social interaction is just talking. But a group of players sitting around talking, in the personas of their characters, has a certain formlessness; it's too much like what players do anyway, during slow phases in an action story, and then stop doing when the next fight starts. And without rules and game mechanics, the articulate players will naturally do the most talking, and dominate the social scenes. A tongue-tied player can't easily take the role of a herald or salesman -- even though a clumsy or timid player could take the role of a warrior or assassin. Ironically, the situations that seem to call most for roleplaying make it hardest actually to assume a role different from one's own personality.

But it's tricky to come up with rules for social interaction. Fights and battles have a natural structure. They don't just drag on and on, until someone gets bored and starts a conversation or a shopping trip out of boredom. They have a beginning, with the first combat move, and an end, when the last foe retreats or dies; they have a sequence; they have a series of successes and failures as they develop. The scenes many players first think of as "social interaction" don't have any of that; they're just people talking with each other.

However, many social situations do have a structure. One example is the formal dance. It's possible to play out such a dance as a series of encounters that add up to a larger whole, just as a series of combats add up to a battle. Most systems of game mechanics provide rules and mechanisms that can represent these encounters. Here, then, are guidelines for roleplaying a dance as a scenario.

This treatment uses **GURPS** rules for skill and rolls, but many other game systems provide comparable mechanics for handling social interactions. Many of the rolls are treated as Influence rolls (that is, Quick Contests of one character's skill against another's Will), but GMs may choose to let players go by reaction rolls instead, if their characters have the relevant skills only at default.

What Kind of Event Is This?

Dances come in many styles, from drunken brawls to elaborately ritualized courtly entertainments. To make this event interesting for player characters, we assume the following:

- Men are going to dance with women, pairing up in some way.
- Either men and women arrive in separate parties, or if they arrive as couples, it's accepted that they'll split up and dance with other partners.
- A lot of unmarried people will be attending the dance and looking each other over.
- The doors aren't open to anyone who cares to walk in; either formal invitations or tickets purchased in advance are required.

(This doesn't pin things down very hard; it could be an American senior prom or a colonial Spanish fandango. But it excludes, for example, a bunch of drunken Russians forming a dance line in a tavern; the dramatic tensions and roleplaying opportunities there are different.)

Making an Entrance

The first thing that happens at a dance is that people arrive. This isn't just a matter of quietly slipping in; the goal is to make an impression.

First, determine the order in which people arrive. If all the player characters are going to arrive as a group, they only need to specify "early" or "late." If each is going to come separately, alone or with a party, have each player roll one die, with 1s arriving at the outset and 6s not showing up until the dancing is already in progress.

To give the player characters someone to interact with other than each other, create some individual NPCs, at least one per player character. If the player characters are all the same sex, the NPCs should all be the other sex; if the player characters are mixed, the NPCs should be as well. Determine when these individual NPCs arrive. If the dance has specific hosts, or chaperones, create them as NPCs also, but assume they're there from the start.

There will also be a pool of background NPCs; assume that they arrive in groups and don't individually stand out. If there are identifiable groups in the setting, mention what those groups are and when each arrives.

In the order in which characters arrive, determine what kind of impression each one makes. In **GURPS** terms, this is a roll against Savoir-Faire (High Society). However, it's influenced by the character's appearance; apply the opposite sex reaction modifiers for attractiveness or unattractiveness. Treat this as a multiperson Quick Contest, in which the goal is to attain the greatest degree of success or the least degree of failure. Any character who achieves a critical success will be universally admired; any character who suffers a critical failure will commit some embarrassing faux pas, from stumbling at the threshold (roll vs. DX or Acrobatics to avoid actually falling down, but in any case, he will visibly plunge forward, out of balance) to fleeing the room in panic at the crowd. The character's mental disadvantages may suggest a suitable failure mode.

Clothes Make the Man

At the GM's discretion, the quality of a character's garments may influence the initial impression. Treat this as modification of a nontechnological skill by equipment quality. Start by defining the Status of the dance, based on the average Status of the people invited or expected to attend. Basic equipment is formal wear for this Status, costing 40% of monthly cost of living. Good formal wear costs 5× basic price and gives +1 to Savoir-Faire; fine formal wear costs 20× basic price and gives +2 to Savoir-Faire. Both sorts must be tailored for the individual wearer, rather than bought off the rack; this takes an hour of actual work, but a business will normally promise to finish the job the next day, to gain flexibility in scheduling. In addition to these bonuses, a character with Fashion Sense can gain an extra +1 (or grant it to another character whose clothes he helps pick out).

A character who doesn't own formal wear -- usually because the event's above his Status -- can go out and buy some, paying the necessary high price. If he has Merchant skill, he can try to get it for less. Or he can find it with a Scrounging roll and a few hours in the garment district or at old clothes dealers or thrift stores. Treat the Status of the outfit as a negative modifier to Scrounging skill; for example, finding a high society evening gown (Status 4) would require a roll against Scrounging-4. Scrounged clothing typically costs about 10% of the price of new clothing, and sometimes may be had for nothing, but it counts as improvised equipment, giving -2 to Savoir-Faire. (The +1 from Fashion Sense can partially counterbalance this.) A critical success on Scrounging may avoid the penalty. Finally, an Heir, or a character with a suitable Patron, Ally, or Contact, may be able to obtain formal wear as a favor; its quality is up to the GM's judgment.

A character with the skill of Sewing can try to modify a scrounged garment into something more appropriate to the occasion. Fashion Sense gives +1 to effective skill. A character who is working on clothing for himself is at -1 to effective skill, because he can't easily work on the garment while he's wearing it. A success produces a garment that looks as good as standard formal wear for a garment with the same Status. A critical success raises the garment's Status by 1. The standard time required for this kind of modification is one day.

Invite players to describe how their characters are dressed, and what sort of effect they're aiming for. At the GM's discretion, a good description can be worth an extra +1 to Savoir-Faire.

Change Lobsters and Dance

Once most of the characters have arrived, the actual dancing can start. Each dance requires at least two tasks of characters who participate in it: finding a partner, and actually dancing.

In American customs, and those of many other cultures, the traditional rule is that men ask women to dance, and women either accept or reject such invitations. GMs may follow this rule, or switch the roles, or assume that either sex can ask the other. These rules will assume the traditional custom; anyone who prefers not to can translate "man" into "person who invites another person to dance" and "woman" into "person who accepts or rejects an invitation to dance."

As each dance is getting started, men will be looking around for partners. To start with, players whose characters are male can simply pick women their characters would like to dance with. However, they may have competition, either from other player characters or from NPCs. Assume that any woman whose initial impression roll was a success will have one NPC asking her to dance, and that any woman whose initial impression roll was a critical success will have 1d NPC attending her. To be the first to ask her, a man needs to succeed in a Quick Contest of Perception against any other men who are interested. Alternatively, he can pick a woman whose initial impression roll was a failure, or look for a woman in the pool of background NPCs; a successful Perception roll will find such a woman who's open to an invitation to dance.

Asking a woman to dance requires an Influence roll, a Quick Contest of the man's skill vs. the woman's Will. If the man wins the contest, the woman dances with him; if he loses, she tells him she doesn't care to dance. The usual skill for such invitations is Savoir-Faire. However, Dancing skill may be substituted for Savoir-Faire; it's reasonable to assume that anyone who has learned to dance has also learned to ask for a dance. Another applicable skill is Sex Appeal, but only with a partner who might conceivably find the man appealing; a heterosexual man, a lesbian, or an adult woman approached by a twelve-year-old won't respond to such an approach.

What if the player character is a woman? If she made a favorable impression, she'll have at least one male NPC asking her for each dance, plus any male player characters who wish to do so. The player can decide whether she accepts or rejects an invitation, without a Will roll, but a roll against the NPC's Dancing, Savoir-Faire, or Sex Appeal can indicate how appealing his approach is. Otherwise, she can spot a suitable male NPC with a Perception roll, and suggest to him that she might be receptive to an invitation with an Influence roll, based on either Savoir-Faire or Sex Appeal, but not on Dancing skill. If he asks, she should accept.

A player who comes up with good dialogue may be given +1 to the Influence roll, at the GM's discretion. The GM may also decide that a given NPC is eager to find partners (+1 to +3) or very cautious about being seen with an undesirable partner (-1 to -3).

Once the dance starts, both partners roll against Dancing skill, if the dance is familiar, or Dancing-3, if it's unfamiliar. A success indicates that the character danced well and was enjoyable to dance with; a critical success indicates that the character danced brilliantly and was generally admired. Failure means that the character was stiff or awkward and not a good partner; failure by more than 4 points means that the character got the steps completely wrong. Critical failure indicates some sort of social disaster; GMs may choose to require a Fright Check.

Dances come in three basic types: couples dances, where the partners maintain some form of physical contact; line dances, where they face each other and follow each other's movements (some current dance styles can be treated as freeform variants on this form); and circle dances, where the partners are part of a larger group. Depending on the cultural background, all dances may be of one type, or different types may alternate.

In couples dances, if one partner fails a Dancing roll, and the other succeeds by a greater margin, the one who succeeds can make the one who fails look good. Both of them will know, but other people won't usually notice. Anyone who specifically watches such a couple, and makes a Perception-based Dancing roll, will figure it out, though.

In couples and line dances, either partner can attempt a Sex Appeal roll during the dance. This can represent anything from flirtatious glances to a close embrace. Treat this as an Influence roll; the goal may be either to ask for another

dance, or to invite one's partner to sit the next dance out, leading to private conversation, a visit to the punchbowl, or a stroll on a moonlit balcony.

Having a map board, with individual characters represented by tokens or figures, can be a help in playing out such scenes.

Strategies

At the start of the event, at least two dances should be played out in full detail, with any latecomers missing the first but getting to take part in the second. But it's not necessary to play out every dance this exhaustively. Rather, after between two and four dances, shift focus to a general overview of the occasion, as seen by each player character.

To organize this, ask each player what his character's goals are for the dance as a whole. Then determine how they all work out, through a mixture of dice rolls and roleplaying. Note down all the goals before resolving any, and look at how they impact each other; if one character's actions are going to affect other characters' situations, resolve those actions first.

The things characters can do over the course of a dance fall into three broad categories. The first and simplest is for them to enter into the spirit of the event and pursue something that it's intended to offer them. They may simply want to dance with as many and as attractive partners as possible. They may want to meet new people and make a good impression. Or they may want to begin a courtship, or find someone suitable for courting, or to arrange a one-night stand or a quick tryst in some corner or back room.

Another possibility is pursuing a goal that disrupts the event in some way. In many settings, an attempt at seduction will do this, especially if the seducer is caught by a jealous spouse or suitor; some dances will have chaperones for the event, or duennas to keep watch over unmarried women, to prevent such things. Uninvited "guests" who force their way in can be a major source of problems. Invited guests can cause problems in other ways, such as becoming excessively drunk, starting fights, or insulting someone in a way that calls for a duel the next morning or a fistfight in the nearest alley.

Finally, a dance can provide cover for other activities. These can range from the innocuous, such as delivering a package or meeting for a private discussion, to the nefarious, such as casing the site of a planned burglary or killing one of the other guests. Any fan of espionage films can think of some examples.

GURPS and many other roleplaying games provide rules for working out the consequences of such actions. Give each player time in the spotlight, to pursue his character's personal agenda.

Save the Last Dance for Me

Some dances, such as high school and college Homecoming dances, have a ritual of choosing a king and queen of the event. This can be a useful dramatic device, with a few procedural liberties. To pick the queen of the event, ask all the players whose characters are male to name their favorites, and see who comes out in the lead. Then do the same with the sexes reversed.

The king and queen of the event will dance the final dance together. The player characters can choose partners for a final dance, or be approached by a suitably interesting NPC.

After that, the dance ends and the dancers go home, either with someone they met at the dance, or with the people they came with. Offer each player the chance for a few final comments, in character, to sum up the occasion.

A dance may have a continuing impact on the lives of some people who attended it, in the form of a temporary Reputation, lasting for a month. This has no point cost, but is treated the same as a permanent Reputation while it lasts. A critical success on making an entrance, or in dancing, will earn a +1 on reactions to the character; various forms of

disruptive behavior can earn a -1. The GM must determine which groups are affected by the modifier.

Conclusion

A formal dance of this kind can be used for a variety of purposes in a campaign. To start with, in a campaign that's very strongly focused on personal relationships, a dance provides a stage on which to play out the growth of those relationships. It can serve the same type of function in a soap opera or courtly intrigue campaign that a fight scene performs in an action/adventure campaign.

In a more typical adventure campaign, a dance can be a place to develop subplots. For example, in a supers campaign, the heroes may avoid romantic relationships in their heroic identities, but pursue them when off duty; attending a dance is one way to do this -- and perhaps give the hero a new love interest to be threatened by villainous plots.

Finally, a dance can be the background for an action/adventure situation. Perhaps a vampire shows up at a college dance, or rebels in an aristocratic society come looking for sons and daughters of the ruling class to take hostage. Adventurers may encounter the situation because they happen to be attending the dance, or may be sent there specifically to guard against it. When the daughter of the President makes her debut, for example, there will be Secret Service agents on duty keeping her safe.

The formal structure of the dance, as a social event, lets the GM move the focus of attention from player to player, giving everyone a chance to roll against his character's social skills, in the same way that everyone gets to roll against combat skills in a battle. All of the players, not just the quick-witted and outgoing ones, can get a chance to develop their characters' personalities and personal relationships -- in other words, to do some actual roleplaying.

Finally, many other social events can be approached in similar ways. GMs can use this treatment of dances as a model for turning the events that interest them into game mechanics, with dice rolls and a play sequence.

Pyramid Review

Villainy Amok (for *Champions*)

Published by [Hero Games](#)

Written by Scott Bennie

Cover by Brett Barkley

Illustrated by Matthew Tito Cuenca, Fredd Gorham, Patrick McEnvoy, Derek Stevens, & Greg Smith

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Every genre and RPG has its clichés, many of which are fun to play. Of course, play them too often and they become, well, clichés. For example, the super-hero game has plenty, including foiling the bank raid, rushing into a burning building to rescue a baby, or being shrunk to microscopic size. As fun as they are, the GM can only use such standbys so often before his players groan, moan, and eventually lose interest. Which is where ***Villainy Amok*** comes in very handy, because it is designed to breathe new life into commonly found situations.

Written for ***Champions***, this supplement takes seven different situations and throws a spin or two at them so that the GM can use them over and over again. Or at least, a few more times until the players groan, moan, and so on. Presented in separate chapters, each explores the what, the where, the who, and the why, plus associated statistics and write-ups along with a ready-to-play scenario and a set of tables that lets the GM randomly generate the elements of a situation. All of this is presented in Hero Games' usual house style, meaning that it is decently organized, well edited, and if the internal artwork is somewhat ordinary, some of it is at least amusing. An example of this depicts the sudden arrival of the mole people as a puzzled hero looks on.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Villainy Amok opens with "Hands in the Air!," a look at the bank robbery, a crime it assures is on the rise in the USA as increased border scrutiny makes smuggling a harder prospect. The bank robbery is an in-between affair, the super-hero RPG equivalent of the appetizer run either as an isolated event prior to the adventure proper, or as a method of laying clues to said adventure. It can be run with the heroes possessing knowledge in advance of the robbery, with them interrupting midway, or in the aftermath as they try to track down the miscreants. Detailed in turn are the various types of banks, what can found inside, including statistics for an ATM, as well as the typical staff and customers (or hostages) inside, and any law enforcement waiting outside. Possible twists include having the bank president commit the robbery, the untimely intervention of a rival hero (who of course, gets all the credit), and the pensioner held hostage, but is just not going to take any stick. The scenario, "The national Union Bank," easily scales to the number of player characters involved, and while the provided map is useful for both the scenario and smaller branches, it is a pity that a larger branch could have been mapped also.

While the supplement is too small to do justice to the whole of the alien invasion scenario, it can at least tackle its prelude. This is the arrival of the alien probe, all ready to scout out the lay of the land, test out Earth's defenses, or determine if humanity is suitable for some nefarious purpose. In "The Threat Beyond," the probes come in four flavors: the strange ooze, the extraterrestrial weed, the scuttling killing machine, and the traditional tripod. It is the latter, a perennial favorite that forms the threat in the included scenario, "Menace in the Downtown Core," which has them

crash landing and rampaging through the heroes' city center.

More Silver Age than contemporary in feel, "Ask Your Doctor If Metatron Is Right For You?" explores the idea that anyone can be a super-hero through the application of drugs. Most obviously this is a source of new supervillains, but it can be used to tell a horrifying or cautionary tale, perhaps to bring a touch of the tragic melodrama to the campaign. Essentially, the superpower drug is a device that will affect NPCs rather than heroes. Of course small time thugs will want it to gain their revenge on the heroes, but the storytelling possibilities are riper still if an NPC, perhaps a reformed thug, takes the drug in order to do good. Several templates are used to model various possible effects, such as turning the imbibor into an animal type or granting him psionic, electricity, or speed powers, all with harmful side effects. Metatron is the drug of choice for the adventure, "Metatron Falls From The Heavenly Heights," this "beautiful drug" turning the user into his idealized version, though to the detriment of his ability to deal with stress. This is a short affair, amounting to little more than busting the lab, though given what the drug promises, there will always be demand, so it can appear again.

As the title suggests, "Burn Baby Burn!" is all about fire, specifically having the heroes rush into the burning building to rescue the screaming woman or wailing baby. More mechanically intensive than other chapters, it is in many ways, the least interesting.

Like the earlier chapter on drugs, science dominates both "It Came From The Mad Scientist's Lab" and "Honey, They Shrunk The Superheroes," the latter a chapter title the book manages to get wrong twice. The first looks at all that mad science can produce and all that could and should go wrong. From immortality and the earthquake machine to uplifting animals and building the world's latest, greatest computer, this is all comic book science. The scenario, "The Black Hole Blues," has the heroes trying to prevent the sinisterly named Dr. Graves from harnessing the power of another black hole. Of course, being shrunk can happen as a result of magic as well as science, but either way, the heroes will probably end up traversing somebody's body to rid it of a bomb, disease, or nanite infestation; face their pets suddenly a lot larger and fiercer; solving problems as kid-sized versions of themselves; or unknowingly end up in a land of giants and not small at all. Another option is the dimension in a bottle, a microverse that could easily be come a campaign feature. Of course, knowing all this there are no surprises for what the scenario, "With A Song In His Heart And A Bomb In His Head," involves.

Possibly the best-titled chapter is "My Big Fat Caped Wedding," a look at all things matrimonial for the super-hero. Perhaps a union between two supers, a hero and a normal person, or between a hero and an alien, all of which is best played out to semi-comic effect. Such affairs are wrought with complications, and this is more true for the supers wedding, from strange alien wedding customs, keeping secret and super-hero identities separate, and even having to come to terms with the fact that a hero's father-in-law happens to be the infamous Dr. Destroyer! Of all the scenarios in **Villainy Amok**, "The Wedding In The Champions Universe," is the least useful as it is very setting specific, but that does not mean that it cannot be used as a model in other universes.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The supplement is rounded out with a Plot Gallery and a little more. The gallery lists everything from campaign set-up ideas and villainous master plans to dependent NPC scenario hooks and rumors to investigate. While it suggests the use of **Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks** as a source of ready-made villains, **Villainy Amok** gives two of its own. The Engineer is a constantly self-engineering and adapting cyborg who embraces the machine utopia, and Invictus is the "hero" turned congressman. Both characters appear in scenarios given in the book.

While **Villainy Amok** is presented as a series of chunks or nuggets, the author's style is engaging and he throws in quite a few references as examples along the way, often from *Dr. Who*. The book is rife with ideas, all ready to extract, develop, and use. Some of the best appear in each chapter's Ten Unusual List, such as a villain robbing the bank not for its money, but for the toughened metal of its vault; a villain offering everyone a one-kiloton nuclear device to ensure a polite society; or when a transforming power goes awry, it leaves the heroes as white rabbits. . . or, more correctly, *white rabbits with superpowers!* Of course, a GM could just use each chapter's table to generate a scenario or two.

There is a great deal to like in **Villainy Amok**, and while it comes with more than a double helping of cheese, it is

nevertheless a *very* useful book. The random scenario generator at the end of each chapter might be seen as a tool of last resort, but together with the accompanying suggestions and discussion, the book really does help breath new life into old clichés. And occasionally, a cliché has its place in a game, though of course, it should never be done to death. So despite being written with ***Champions*** in mind, ***Villainy Amok*** is *the* utility book to have on the shelf for *any* super-hero RPG.

--*Matthew Pook*

The Wedding Crasher

*"Oh, it got me drinkin' and then suddenly I'm staggerin' into church
And I'm dancin' like Baryshnikov all across the high altar
Oh I bet that you're still mortified
But just think, girl,
No one's ever gonna be forgettin'
The day I wrecked your wedding."
-- Black 47, "Maria's Wedding"*

The bride is lovely, the groom is nervous, the garden is full, and the wedding is underway. What could go wrong? Well, if you didn't invite Eris, pretty much everything could go wrong. Let's take a bite of Eris' apple and see how it tastes.

*"Peirithous married Hippodameia, or Deidameia, daughter of Butes -- or, some say, of Adrastus -- and invited all the Olympians to his wedding, except Ares and Eris; he remembered the mischief Eris had caused at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis."
-- Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths**

Peirithous didn't invite Eris to his wedding, but he did invite the Centaurs. And, as Centaurs will, they got into the wine, and started ravishing bridesmaids and carrying off the gifts (and the bride) and generally spreading chaos. Fortunately, Peirithous also invited his best friend, Theseus, who slew an immense number of Centaurs in the process of rescuing the bride. Of course, that started a lengthy war between the Centaurs and Peirithous' people, the Lapiths, which raged for years and wound up immortalized in marble on one side of the Parthenon. And as Pindar or someone (Graves is unclear) may have put it, "Ares and Eris engineered this war as revenge for the slight thus offered them." (This was before the napkin ring was invented, so petty wedding revenge had to be more dramatic.)

This is only one of the great "theft of the bride" stories from Greek myth. During the Lapith-Centaur War, Theseus met Heracles, who knew a little something about Centaurs at weddings -- the Centaur Nessus had tried to kidnap his bride Deianeira, too. (Both "Deianeira" and "Deidameia" are cognate with the Greek word for "loot," interestingly enough.) Orpheus, of course, famously lost Eurydice to a snakebite at his wedding -- she was "stolen" by Hades, god of death. The wedding, symbolically, represents the perfect, complete society -- that's why all Shakespeare's comedies end with one, for example. The world of the wedding is a world of perfect peace, a garden if you will. The snake (or other embodiment of chaos) that disrupts a married couple in a garden is perhaps the most familiar story in all mythology. And Eris is just visible on the edge of it.

*"Ares drove the Trojans on . . . and Phobos drove them, and Deimos, and Eris whose wrath is relentless, she is the sister and companion of murderous Ares, she who is only a little thing at the first, but thereafter grows until she strides on the earth with her head striking heaven. She then hurled down bitterness equally between both sides as she walked through the onslaught making men's pain heavier."
-- Homer, *Iliad*, IV:441*

Eris doesn't become a lot more visible anywhere else, either, but that's about what you should expect from the daughter of Night and Darkness. According to Hesiod, she gave birth to the evils of the world, and governed war and slaughter. Interestingly, Hesiod also claims that Eris was twins -- the Eris of Strife and the Eris of Competition -- but then ignores his own theory for the rest of the book. Both Hesiod and Homer seem to identify Eris with Enyo, "sacker of cities" and goddess of battles. Enyo is even murkier than Eris; her Roman incarnation Bellona was identified also with the Cappadocian goddess Ma, who we also know as Cybele. Enyo was also the name of one of the three Graiae, the Gray Sisters with one eye and one tooth between them. Is it our Enyo? Who can say? The Graiae were sea-demons, and their resemblance to the Fates (also daughters of Night, according to Hesiod) is clear. Eris fades into Hekate going one way, Cybele the other. Under her own name, Eris fought against Zeus during the war with Typhon, and against Dionysos during his invasion of India. And of course she fought for the Trojans during the Trojan War, which was only fair, because after all, she started it. At a wedding.

"Jove is said to have invited to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis all the gods except Eris, or Discordia. When she came later and was not admitted to the banquet, she threw an apple through the door, saying that the fairest should take it."

-- Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 92

Eris, alone of the gods, wasn't invited to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, and her resulting misbehavior was the reason she didn't get invited to Peirithous' bash either. Eris tossed a Golden Apple over the gates into the banquet, engraved with the word *Kallisti*, meaning "to the fairest." Aphrodite, Athena, and Hera immediately began arguing over who it belonged to. Zeus, no dummy, had Paris, a prince of Troy in exile, judge the ensuing beauty contest. When Aphrodite bribed Paris with the love of the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen (not yet "of Troy"), the resulting theft of a bride (not from a wedding, admittedly, but still) started the Trojan War. This is all very familiar, and you may note, by the way, that we've now added the apple to our "disrupted garden" mytheme. "The fruit that the woman gave me," as Adam so unchivalrously puts it. Virgil even links the two, describing Eris with "viperine hair."

But as always with Eris, there's still more going on than you might think, a tangle of chaos underneath the bright wedding garlands. According to the *Cypria*, a fragmentary epic, Zeus planned the whole thing with Themis, the Titaness governing Law, in order to bring about the war. In classical art, Themis is often seen watching the Judgment of Paris from "off stage," which is certainly suspicious. (Themis : Law :: Eris : Chaos. Recall that Hesiod briefly hints at two Erises. Hmmm.) Even more interesting, the Golden Apple may well have been the Golden Sheep, i.e., the Golden Fleece -- or vice versa; as Apuleius points out, *meloi khryseoi* can be translated either way. Eris shows up even more faintly in the myth of Jason; according to one version of the *Argonautica*, Medea cast an Eristic enchantment over Jason's helmet. The parallels between Jason and Heracles (who likewise took the Golden Apples of the West -- guarded by three nymphs -- from a dragon) are intriguing, and Heracles of course brings us back to the abducted bride. Medea, meanwhile, shares with Thetis the strange habit of killing her children to make them immortal. Jason sowed dragon's teeth; so did Cadmus, who famously visited Thera -- or as it was known then, Kallisti. That would be Thera, as in Atlantis, the Golden Island in the West, as in the "garden destroyed by chaos," namely the sea, namely the Graiae. For someone who's never invited anywhere, following Eris sure gets us everywhere.

*"Three Golden Apples from the Hesperian grove,
A present Worthy of the Queen of Love,
Gave wise Hippomenes Eternal Fame,
And Atalanta's cruel Speed O'ercame.
In Vain he follows 'till with Radiant Light,
One Rolling Apple captivates her Sight,
And by its glittering charms retards her flight."
-- Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens**

All our themes come together again in the story of Atalanta and Hippomenes, albeit with Eris practically invisible. The fleet-footed Atalanta had been warned by the Oracle of Delphi (which at this time channeled either Eris' ally Typhon, or Themis, depending on which source you read) that her marriage would lead to disaster. (Aha!) So she announced that she would only yield to the man who could beat her in a foot-race. Hippomenes appealed to Aphrodite, who gave him three Golden Apples. By throwing them off the track, he was able to lure Atalanta into slowing to pick them up; he won the race, and her hand. But after their wedding, their ardor could not wait for nightfall, so they snuck off to a deserted temple to Cybele (double aha!) and consummated the marriage then and there, for which disrespect Cybele turned them both into lions.

And this myth turns out to be the main theme of the alchemist Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens*, which he almost certainly wrote while in England at the court of Princess Elizabeth. (While there he also wrote something called the *Themis Aurea* -- "Golden Themis.") And as Frances Yates points out in *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, Princess Elizabeth's 1613 wedding to the Elector Frederick of the Palatinate served as the model and emblem of the "Chemical Wedding" of the Rosicrucians. (This is as good a place as any to mention that the apple and the rose are both members of the order Rosaceae.) Both Elizabeth and Frederick had lions as heraldic animals, symbolically reversing Atalanta's fate. Their wedding was celebrated in Germany with a pageant of Jason and the Golden Fleece, and in England with a

masque on the theme of Orpheus (!) and Harmony. In other words, it was an attempt at a perfect alchemical joining, a magical marriage to which Discord -- Eris -- was emphatically not invited.

*"Upon thy wedding-day?
Against the blood that thou hast married?
What! shall our feast be kept with slaughter'd men?
Shall braying trumpets and loud churlish drums,
Clamours of hell, be measures to our pomp?"*
-- William Shakespeare, *King John*, III:i:312-316

And by now we all know how well that works. Frederick's grab for the throne of Bohemia in 1619 wound up starting the Thirty Years' War, three times as long as the Achaeans besieged Troy. Habsburg troops sacked Frederick's palaces and libraries, and he and Elizabeth were forced into exile. Their son, Prince Rupert of the Rhine, would likewise find his life blasted by civil war, tearing apart Elizabeth's England just as Frederick's Germany was destroyed. For every magical action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

So what, in this story, is the Golden Apple? Well, that's hard to say, but in properly cruel Eristic style, it might well have been the Rosicrucian Order itself. It represented alchemical perfection -- gold -- and we've previously discussed the connection between roses and apples. It would only reveal itself to the worthy ("to the fairest") and was intimately connected with Atlantis (Francis Bacon, of course, wrote *The New Atlantis*) and gardens (Frederick's ornamental gardens were the envy of Europe). And Yates argues, not unconvincingly, that part of the reason Frederick grabbed for the Bohemian crown was that the Prague of John Dee was the heart of the Rosicrucian movement. Further, that he may have believed the Rosicrucian movement of putative alchemists, sorcerers, and invisible conspirators gave him an edge, a kind of Achilles' invulnerability that made the game worth the candle. But as a different judge said at a different trial of three, all that glisters is not gold.

"One day Mal-2 consulted his Pineal Gland and asked Eris if She really created all of those terrible things. She told him that She had always liked the Old Greeks, but that they cannot be trusted with historic matters. 'They were,' She added, 'victims of indigestion, you know.'"
-- Malaclypse the Younger, *Principia Discordia*

We now pause for a message from the Goddess. Everything in this column is Lies, especially the true things. Eris helped inspire the Discordian religion, named for Her Roman name, Discordia. She revealed Her wisdom to Kerry Thornley and Greg Hill in a bowling alley in "1957 or 58," specifically "Look around and you can see all of the chaos in everything just as much as you can see order." While that is diametrically contrary to the standard philosophy of the Suppressed Transmission, on the other hand, it's not either. In keeping with Eris as Enyo, immediately after receiving Her revelation, Kerry Thornley was called up for active duty by the U.S. Marine Corps. During this tour, he met and befriended Lee Harvey Oswald, eventually publishing a book, *The Idle Warriors*, centered on Oswald's experiences in the Marines, in 1962. Was Oswald the Peirithous to Thornley's Theseus? The snake in the American garden? Did he, like Eris, have an evil twin? According to the testimony of Dallas Police Captain John W. Fritz before the Warren Commission, Lee Harvey Oswald got "a cheese sandwich and an apple" from his landlady Ruth Paine for lunch on November 22, 1963. Immediately after that lunch, Strife and Discord stalked America, sprung full-grown from the shattered forehead of the king. And that is why you should never pick up any strange apples. Or at least, if at all possible, invite a little chaos -- a little Eris -- to your wedding. After all, it's her day.

Fluxx Love Stories

by Andy Looney, inventor of ***Fluxx***

I love my job. As a game designer, I bring people together, and I entertain them, through my games. It gives me a special thrill, knowing that at this very minute, people are having fun doing something that I showed them how to do. Whenever a group sits together and has fun playing an Andy Looney game, the joy I've brought to the world keeps on expanding. I don't think I can really express how wonderful this feels.

But as delightful as it is to know that others have laughed and had fun with my creations, what's even better are the stories I hear about the way my games -- and in particular, ***Fluxx*** -- have made a real difference in their lives. These are what I call the ***Fluxx*** Love Stories. I'd like to share a few of those here.

I think the first such story I heard came in the form of an email which was one of our earliest entries in a file we now call the "Testimonial of the Week." I'd like to just quote Barbara's message verbatim right here: "Do you know what you people have done to my marriage? We've turned *off* the television after the kids go to bed and actually have conversations over hand after hand of ***Fluxx***. Had we had ***Fluxx*** sooner, we could have saved hundreds of dollars on marriage counseling!"

Wow! ***Fluxx*** isn't just fun, it's actually saving marriages! Not only that, it's getting involved in the start of marriages as well. Last month at Origins, I met a charming couple named Josh and Teddi. They'd just gotten engaged, in a tender moment that featured a ***Fluxx*** card! Josh used a blank ***Fluxx*** card to create the special goal, "Live Happily Ever After" with the message "Teddi, Will You Marry Me?" and played it during a game. (Josh has been a fan of our games since first buying a case from us at our very first Origins booth. He knew Teddi was the girl for him when he told her he liked games and she asked if he'd ever heard of ***Fluxx***.) Best Wishes to Teddi and Josh!

Obviously, it's way-cool to see my game being used as a method for Popping the Question. But even more amazing was the story of the couple who planned their whole wedding around **Fluxx**!

Each invitation to the wedding of DeeAnn & Curtis included a set of four custom-made **Fluxx** cards. Using the do-it-yourself expansion cards we sell, called **Fluxx Blanxx**, they'd created a mini-expansion of their own, and included a set in every invitation. The four special cards they created were as follows:

- **Keeper: Marriage** (featuring a nifty-looking hand-drawn wedding ring)
- **Goal: Love and Marriage** (which said "please join us to celebrate our wedding" with their names and wedding particulars in the place where it normally would say "You win if you have Love and Marriage on the table.")
- **New Rule: Community Property** (which said "Yours + Mine = Ours: Keepers are shared among players. Thus, if one player has Love showing while another has Marriage, both win if the Love and Marriage goal is played.")
- **Action: Mingle** (which said "Mix everyone's hands together and deal the cards back evenly. Start with yourself. Reception to follow the wedding ceremony.")

Also included were special directions, which read as follows: "How to Play the Game of Love: Come to the wedding! You received four **Fluxx** expansion cards with this invitation, and you need a complete **Fluxx** deck to play. Conveniently enough, one **Fluxx** deck will be on each table at the reception."

It sounded like a really groovy wedding, and I'm honored to have been a part of it, as it were. Best wishes to Curtis &

DeeAnn!

But not all **Fluxx** Love Stories are tales of romance. Some are stories of the human struggle, up to and including Death. I'll never forget playing **Fluxx** at Origins a few years ago with a beautiful little girl and her mom. The girl had diabetes, and it was really touching to see their special **Fluxx** deck, which contained a whole bunch of extra cards they'd created that related to the issues of coping with this disease. **Fluxx** had become not just fun, but also a way of learning about how to cope and survive with their particular life challenges!

Then there's the story I heard from a fan about how **Fluxx** had helped a group overcome grief. He'd been at a convention where an important elderly gentleman, the guest of honor I believe, had collapsed and *died* right there at the event! Can you imagine coping with the aftermath of that? Well, for this guy and the people he was with, it was round after round of **Fluxx** that got them through that long, difficult night.

I'm sure there are others that I've heard but I can't remember just now, and I'm sure I'll hear many more in the years to come -- and I'll never tire of hearing them. If you've got a **Fluxx** Love Story, please send it to me! Thanks!

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Mawwaige, That Bwessed Awaingement

When you think about it, weddings are something of a cultural anomaly. After all, a wedding is the only social event that I can think of which is:

1. near-universal (that is, just about every culture has weddings of some sort)
2. focused (that is, it's specifically about a certain person or persons)
3. largely celebrated (that is, most people aspire to get married) and
4. celebrated largely (that is, most people who get married aspire to some kind of wedding where more than three people will show up)

In other words, a wedding is just about the only event where most people expect a huge number of people to show up and celebrate just for the two people getting married.

Breaking these down a bit, we see other events fall short of these criteria. Although large numbers of people celebrate bar mitzvahs, for example, they aren't near-universal. Holidays - such as Halloween and New Year's - pass the "near-universal" and "largely celebrated/celebrated largely" test, but they fall short in the "focused" department. (I suppose you could say that something like a Christmas party is focused on one person, but if you tried to then I'd just rejigger the definition of "focused" to mean "a living, physical person you can give a blender to," so it's in all our interests if you just don't even try.)

Birthday parties are near-universal, focused, and largely celebrated, but they aren't celebrated largely (since most people will never know a banquet-hall birthday bash with guest speakers and rows of clinking glasses). Funerals are much the same way: near-universal, focused, and largely celebrated, but many of the dearly departed have very quiet services (and hardly any funerals will end with the threat of the "Chicken Dance" or "The Hokey Pokey").

Random aside:

If you ever find yourself needing to simulate the sinister chanting of strange cultists (and, frankly, who hasn't had that need at least four or five times a week?), simply intone the lyrics to "The Hokey Pokey" backwards, ideally as monotone and ominous as possible:

About all it's what that's around yourself turn you and Pokey Hokey the do you about all it shake you and In foot left your put you. Out foot left your put you. In foot left your put you.

In a pinch, repeating the refrain of "In foot left your put you. Out foot left your put you." sounds suitably cthulhic. But I digress.

Anyway, continuing the scholarly-sounding tradition of bringing up examples that I can immediately shoot down, celebrating the birth of a child is also universal, focused, and largely celebrated, but not celebrated largely.

There are only two counterexamples I can think of. The first is the graduation celebration, which kinda-sorta works in all three categories. But no one ever threw me a graduation party of any sort, so I'm going to ignore it and never speak of it again. The second is the anniversary celebration, which is really just a wedding celebration repeated 50 years later, thereby increasing the "Hokey Pokey Leading to Hip Injury" quotient.

No, weddings are perhaps the only common institution where you expect a bunch of folks to show up and celebrate two specific people . . . even stranger, by design, it's highly likely that most people attending won't know at least one of the focus individuals.

What's more interesting is the fact that what a wedding *is* has changed so dramatically in the decades or so since it's been invented. For example, in biblical times, weddings were a means of acquiring property, securing the peace between families, and securing parentage. Polygamy was common, and the religious aspects of marriage weren't placed

on a pedestal particularly higher than other property arrangements; wives and oxen get the same number of mentions in the Ten Commandments, meaning that coveting your neighbor's ass or your neighbor's wife's ass are about on par.

At some point (in the West) someone realized how crazy it was to subject oneself to multiple spouses, so that idea was done away with. Marriage was still primarily about property and parentage, but the foundations of a romantic view were taking root. (Personally, the juxtaposition in this regard I've always found most fascinating is *Romeo and Juliet*, which has the notion of romantic versus pragmatic marriage as one of its central conflicts. That this could still be a valid concern a mere four centuries ago strikes me as a pretty late development, as far as human culture is concerned.)

Eventually, marriage evolved into the view we hold of it today, which in America is an odd amalgam of the romantic view of a lifelong commitment tinged with the harsh realities of a sky-high failure rate. (Another factoid I find fascinating: The average length a marriage lasts hasn't changed appreciably in the past two hundred years or so. The biggest difference is that nowadays marriages end by divorce after that period of time, and in Ye Olde Dayes marriages tended to end by death. Methinks a lifelong commitment might be a bit easier to adhere to if you only need to worry about being with someone for 20 years, at most.)

From an RPG standpoint, I'm fascinated by the current struggles of many societies (including the U.S.) about the definitions and ramifications of marriage, because they spark so many ideas for application in various gaming genres. As I see it, the troubles are a result of the schizophrenic nature of modern marriage; marriage is unique in being a secularly affirmed contract of what most view as a religious ceremony. (And thus events come full circle, since - for example - the Catholic Church didn't view marriage as a sacrament until the 12th century, at that time making it a religiously affirmed ceremony of a secular contract.) As a result, the secular world's views and expectations on marriage are significantly different from the religious world's. Many parts of the secular world don't particularly care that you love your betrothed, just so long as you can both sign your names and pay the modest license fee; however, the religious world would view such a trivial entry into married life with abject disapproval. The religious world can (and often does) impose restrictions on entry into marriage that don't exist in the secular world; for example, the Catholic Church doesn't allow divorcees to remarry.

In short, you have an institution that has two competing mindsets; they agree on the broad strokes (a monogamous bond between a couple that legitimizes children emergent of that union and provides various other benefits for that couple), but they disagree on many of the fringe cases. And it's in those fringes that we can find gaming ideas:

In a fantasy setting, what does the idea of "'til death do you part" mean if he's a human with a few decades left to live, and she's an elf with a few centuries? Would the law support such a union? Would both cultures?

In a sci-fi setting, can a person and an AI get married? Can two AIs marry? What about two aliens of different species?

In a supers setting, would the existence of a secret identity be grounds for an annulment?

In a cyberpunk setting, would marriage be turned into a "true" contract, up for renewal every (say) five years or so? If so, would secular and religious marriages be entirely "divorced," with religious marriages eschewing this contract arrangement entirely?

In a time travel setting, can . . . well, let's not even go there. ("I'm my own grandpa . . .")

I think what might be most fascinating about marriage for me is that, regardless of its definitions, constraints, and applicability, there's always been one consistent with regards to marriage: the solemnity and importance a married couple should place on the event. While it's been viewed as a formality or expediency in some circumstances, I'm guessing that even most people in those situations agree that marriage *should* be something important, lasting, and worthwhile.

And when a couple loves one another - when there's a true and loving bond between them - there is no limit for how much marriage means to them.

So it is with me. See, in times past I've always believed in the absolute solemnity and gravity of the decision to get married; perhaps ranking only behind the responsibility of bringing a child into this world, I've viewed getting married as one of the most serious decisions a human being can make.

And, for yours truly, this decision was made months ago, and will be brought to fruition this weekend.

On August 13th, I will henceforth be known as "Mr. Steven Marsh." (Okay; technically I was known as that *before* . . . but it's the form of "Mr." that's pronounced in that marital kinda way . . .) And on this same day, my dear friend and beloved partner, Nikki - a woman whose incredible intelligence and wisdom is only brought into question by her agreeability to marry me - will become my wife, and I her husband.

While standing before the most awesome forces I can fathom - God and Nikki's parents - and with the most heartfelt sincerity I possess, I will draw on my actorly and gamemasterly training as I try not to flub my lines:

"I will be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health.

"I will love you and honor you all the days of my life."

And I hope each word rings as true from my lips to her ears on this day, as they do from my fingers to the screen as I type them now.

In the years I've been with *Pyramid*, I've always joked that I've devoted my life to games. Well, on Saturday I will proclaim my devotion to Nikki.

And we can play games together . . . all the days of my life.

I love you, Nikki.

--*Steven Marsh*

Pyramid Reviews

D6 Adventure Locations

Published by [West End Games](#)

Written by John Jamieson, Fred Jandt, Kevin MacGregor, Steven Marsh, Greg Nagler, Aaron Rosenberg, & Nikola Vrtis

Edited by Nikola Vrtis

Art by Aaron Ace, Shawn Brown, Keith Curtis, Anna Dobritt, Randy Nunley (cover) & Ryan Wolfe

Graphic Design by Eric Gibson & Nikola Vrtis

96-page b&w softcover; \$12.95

* * *

D6 Fantasy Locations

Written by Rob Dake, William Jones, & Steven Marsh

Edited by Nikola Vrtis

Art by Thomas M. Baxa, John Bridges & Rob Caswell, Keith Curtis, Whiney Elaine Cogar, Peter A. Deluca, James Dunn, David Gough, Richard Hawran, Cathleen Hunter, Nicole D. Laflamme, Jaime Lombardo & Ron Hill, Aaron McClellan, Kent McDaniel, Matko Matkovic, Chris Moreno (cover), Satu Sormunen, Paul Taaks, & Maria van Bruggen

Graphic Design by Eric Gibson & James Dunn with Nikola Vrtis

112-page black & white softcover; \$15.95

Editor's Note: Both these books contain contributions by Pyramid editor Steven Marsh.

When word came in November 2003 that West End Games was being revived under a new publisher and focusing on the core *D6 System* engine, I was skeptical. West End Games had seen more ups and downs than an Airborne Ranger.

As we rolled into convention season 2004, my skepticism abated. The WEG web site was chock-a-byte with freebies and previews and news. News! They were actually telling us what was going on. At Gen Con Indy of that year I got my first look at the new core books, and I was satisfied that West End Games was on the right track.

One of the earliest supplements came in September 2004: ***D6 Adventure Locations***. This reasonably priced softcover is full of practical supplemental material on locations from airports to zoos, with stops in cemeteries, island strongholds, and alien spaceships along the way. Each locale (over 30 included) is covered with a description, a map, and an inventory of possible props on hand. Where appropriate, game stats for assorted people one might meet are included. (You always needed the write-up for a hotel front desk clerk, didn't you?) Each locale also includes scenario hooks for using the location in an adventure.

The layout is uncomplicated and easy enough to follow, with the usual graphical bells and whistles and visual jokes which have been a hallmark of West End Games back into the *Star Wars* days. Each locale has a unique icon framing its pages (or even its columns); I found this somewhat distracting. The art is almost totally in floor plans or diagrams, with occasional breaks for amusing or inspiring signage. This gives the book an intensely practical and system-free feeling which I admire. Many books claim to be usable for any roleplaying game, but this one delivers. The cover art is strong on action-adventure tropes (helicopters, hidden strongholds, clandestine SCUBA diver) with only a mild dose of fan service. In all, I am very happy with ***D6 Adventure Locations*** and readily recommend it.

When word came down that ***D6 Fantasy Locations*** was in the works, I was pleased but my skepticism rose again. How many different rural villages can you map? A castle is a castle, isn't it? When the book came, I was immediately won over.

D6 Fantasy Locations is organized very differently than its Adventure counterpart. Rather than snapshots of sites, this book is set up in three chapters: "Settlements," "Castles and Fortresses," "And Other Places." In the first we are given brief tours of different kinds of villages and towns, from small hamlets to small cities and with detours into the trees and under the sea. The format is not so structured as in ***D6 Adventure Locations***, but we still get descriptions and stats for people and sites in the area. We also get sidebars with guidance on making believable communities in a fantasy setting. The second chapter gives much the same treatment with fortifications, from the simplest entrenchment to the largest great castle. We are instructed in how the components of a castle contribute to its utility. We also get away from the Western tradition with a good look at Asian-style strongholds. The third chapter picks up the other traditional sites in the genre, from cave complexes to mazes to ruins, temples and mines. Again we are introduced to interesting characters and amusing side trips along the way, including an entirely friendly and practical guide to developing mazes and dungeons.

Rules support for ***D6 Fantasy*** includes a settlement design sheet and a castle design sheet, both useful for deciding and recording features of locations in your campaign. Some new spells and miracles are described, and a few new special abilities are added.

The layout for ***D6 Fantasy Locations*** was much more comfortable to me, with page frames fading into a watermark-style for most pages. Instead of maps, this book has mostly line art to match and add flavor to the text; I found these good to excellent. Given that many fantasy realms have low literacy levels, it's easy to understand the absence of the labels and signs which helped fill out ***D6 Adventure Locations***. (But the wit is still around. I'll get to that in a moment.) It took me several glances to realize that our generic fantasy hero on the cover is confronted with a faceted landscape incorporating elements from throughout the book: Western castle, village, knight; Asian village, stronghold, samurai. Even the ground on which he stands shifts from cobblestones to brick paving.

The real winning point for ***D6 Fantasy Adventures*** for me was in the writing. The book is framed as the narrative of an unnamed bard commissioned to create a guide to interesting places around the realm and often told in the first person. This is a corny conceit, perhaps, but it works for me. This style generates a great sense of fun and adventure in what could otherwise be a very dry and technical book, and fun is what games are supposed to be all about, after all. Like its older sibling, ***D6 Fantasy Locations*** makes an excellent resource for any fantasy adventure game.

West End Games seems to have it in the right groove, and publisher Eric Gibson and his team are to be commended. These books give great value for the dollar and embody a sense of playfulness often lost in the world of rules-driven,

license-managed publishing. With ***D6 Adventure Locations*** and ***D6 Fantasy Locations*** we are given solid resources for the *D6 System* core books as well as any other game we might care to work with. We are also given hope that West End Games will continue to prosper and bring us more quality game books for years to come.

--*Bob Portnell*

Wight Wedding

A Rescue Adventure with stats for *D6 Fantasy*

by Bob Portnell

The wedding of the century, the criers said: the union of the handsome Prince Rodrick of Ardwin to the beauteous Princess Grace of Yandaway at high sun on the following day, Midsummers Day. The castle overflowed with nobles and dignitaries from leagues around. The city below was likewise packed with travelers and visitors hoping for a glimpse of the happy couple.

Within the castle, four royal guards stood watch outside the princess's chamber high in the West Tower. Just before high sun, they heard screams and the sounds of commotion within. Unlocking the door and entering, they found a sight of horror: the maids-in-waiting slain and scattered about the room and the princess in the clutches of a squad of unknown assailants in black and red armor. One royal guard withdrew to sound the alarm. As he left, he heard the princess screaming "No! No! Stop!" The other guardsmen advanced to the defense of their princess and met a bloody fate. When reinforcements arrived, they found three guardsmen dead, only one invader killed and the rest gone . . . along with the princess.

The event was kept as quiet as possible, with rumors of a practice drill for the royal guard quickly circulated among the guests in the keep. Only the King of Yandaway recognized the attacker as wearing the livery of the Kingdom of Barrowfell, serving that land's Necromancer-King Edmund. His Highness concluded that Edmund was attempting to subvert the alliance of Yandaway and Ardwin for an unknown purpose. The King conceived a dangerous plan to recover the princess, but who could execute it? He could not draw on his own knights or nobility without arousing the suspicion of the Ardwins. His High Chamberlain quickly called in a few favors, cultivated some cached information and assembled a small team suitable for a covert mission into far Barrowfell to rescue the princess.

So it is that, in the late afternoon of the day before Midsummer, you find yourself gathered in the most private courtyard of Yandaway's castle, being offered remarkable rewards and cautioned against unspeakable threats to be faced. King Edmund's magical power will be deeply depleted after such an audacious raid in broad daylight. There will be no better time to stage a counterstrike rescue. Will you put yourself in harm's way to recover the fair princess and help guard the peace between Yandaway and Ardwin? Of course you will.

The Rescue Party

This adventure, for characters of intermediate expertise, follows a fairly typical adventuring party as they infiltrate the city and castle of Barrowfell to recover the kidnapped Princess Grace. Time is of the essence as the magical opposition represented by King Edmund the Necromancer will only be diminished temporarily. There will still be cityfolk, guards, traps, and monsters aplenty to challenge the party, so let the player group have a reasonably diverse skill set.

The party must travel light! The gamemaster should emphasize (perhaps through the King's quartermaster, from whom they would take supplies) that they are more likely to be killed than not, and "dead folk don't need two weeks' iron rations." Allow the players time to equip themselves, letting them know that pack animals will not be needed or useful and that turning themselves into pack animals will only jeopardize their mission and the Princess.

Develop ***D6 Fantasy*** heroes in one of three ways. First, one could select a standard template and customize it with 12 skill dice. Equipment is already included on each template. Second, one can use the defined limits method, distributing 18 dice among the attributes and 12 dice among skills. Third, one can use the creation point pool method, spending 84 creation points to make the character. The usual caps on attribute and skill dice apply. Advantages and Special Abilities should be evenly balanced against Disadvantages.

The Rumor Mill

The dark kingdom of Barrowfell is the subject of much legend and lore, some of which is true. Gamemasters may distribute the following information either in "hints" to individual players or via non-player characters. Heroes who opt to have grown up or spent time in Barrowfell will know which of these rumors are true and which are not.

- **Rumor:** Barrowfell is a hard land, surrounded by high mountains and cursed with shortages of most every natural resource including water and arable land.
True. The citizens are proud of their resilience and of the king who maintains order so they can make the most of their lives.
- **Rumor:** Citizens of Barrowfell must submit to a magical branding which makes them easier for King Edmund to rule.
Mostly false. There is a brand, placed on the inner left forearm at age 10, which marks the subject. It is not magical. Outsiders are not allowed through the city gates after sundown.
- **Rumor:** The king and people of Barrowfell worship dark gods who demand the periodic blood sacrifice of children.
False. Patterns of worship in Barrowfell are just the same as in the other kingdoms.
- **Rumor:** A mob of bandits had great success marauding along the northern pass into Barrowfell until King Edmund himself caught them and "drafted" them into his service.
True.
- **Rumor:** The army of Barrowfell is comprised entirely of revived corpse warriors (hereinafter "revenants").
False. Most of the low-level ground troops are revenants, but the knights and officers are all among the living.
- **Rumor:** There are secret ways into the city and into the castle itself.
True. A character with a history in Barrowfell might know one of these routes. This could be given by gamemaster fiat or with a very high roll (difficulty 25 or higher) on an appropriate attribute or skill.
- **Rumor:** Barrowfellers hate outsiders.
False. If anything, they are more friendly to strangers than the people of any other kingdom. Isolation does not always imply isolationism.

Something Old

An hour before sunset, the party is equipped and gathered in the king's courtyard. The high chamberlain opens a visibly ancient box. "This is a Royal Pass," he says, holding up an oversize golden key on a long silver chain. The key is elaborately engraved and decorated with jewels of all colors. "The high kings of ancient days each had one of these. Simply twist the barrel of the key to select your destination. All should then grip the chain. Press here to depart. It permits instant travel to the strongholds of the Six Kingdoms: Yandaway, Ardwin, Gulfland . . . and Barrowfell, too. It is set to take you to Barrowfell now. Change to this position here to return. The King entrusts you with this for the duration of the rescue. It *will* be returned to the king. If you return at all.

"You will arrive outside the city. You must be within the city walls before they close at sundown or your mission will become much more complicated. You will have until sunrise to find the princess and return. Godspeed."

Something New

As expected, the Royal Pass brings the party into a wooded area just off the main road into Barrowfell's east gate. The heroes may attempt to pass themselves off as travelers and enter through the gate. They may try to use one of the hidden ways into the city, if they know of such. They may come up with another option entirely.

Once inside the city, they must find out how to get into the castle and where the princess might be kept. This can be done by asking shopkeepers or barmaids, overhearing other conversations or other methods of investigation and information gathering. This will be the most time-consuming portion of the adventure, and the gamemaster should emphasize the time pressures at work.

The following facts of life in Barrowfell can be learned:

- Crime is low, prosperity is modest but real, and there is a midnight curfew for all citizens. The punishments for violations are harsh and not negotiable. The most extreme is conscription into the army as a revenant.
- The population is mostly kind and friendly people, giving the lie to the traditional legend of the "dark peoples" waiting to storm out of their mountain stronghold to oppress the world. Most Barrowfellers would laugh at this story. A few might get mad.
- When King Edmund hosts guests, he usually has lights in the central tower of the castle. These have not been seen tonight. King Edmund seldom uses the dungeons, finding better ways to make use of prisoners. The torture chamber is used occasionally. These are all below ground level beneath the central tower. Tradesfolk use a side entrance to the castle, but this door is locked by night. It might be possible to climb the rock face abutting the north wall. The gates are guarded, but not heavily so -- only one or two revenants per door or gate, instructed to block access until an officer can arrive. Since few people wish to tempt the ire of the Necromancer-King.
- The majority of the "grunt" work in the Barrowfell army is performed by revenants: the dead, preserved and reanimated by magic. They have no free will of their own, but will obey officers without question. Caution gamemasters! This fact should not be revealed in conversation but by observation if at all possible.

Something Barrowed

Contact with the people of Barrowfell and exposure to the information above should be sufficient for the industrious adventurers to form a plan for entering the castle. If they are early enough, they can pass themselves off as tradesfolk and gain entrance. A successful climbing roll (difficulty 8) can place a hero on the walkway atop the north wall; from there are outdoor stairs into the main courtyard or stairs down one of the guard towers.

Castle exterior doors are typically guarded by two revenants; a single officer makes rounds to inspect and to update any orders. Interior doors to major chambers (the banquet hall, throne room, receiving hall, central tower, etc.) have a single revenant guard. All the interior guards are likewise overseen by a single officer.

The central tower is a "red herring." The guest rooms here are locked (simple key lock, difficulty 6) and not in use (as evidenced by dust).

Entrances to the underground levels are each guarded by two revenants and an officer on station at all times. Doors to each level are locked (complex key lock, difficulty 12), but the officer has the key to his door (and no others).

The dungeons, and the torture chamber below, are empty. The heroes will find another stairway down to a third below-ground level. Here, in a large hall, they will find a squad of three officers and six revenants guarding a passageway. The officers will give challenge and warn the heroes away, insisting that the King wishes no interruptions and no commotion. The players may engineer an imaginative solution here, but this set-piece is intended as the "big fight" for the adventure and the gamemaster may feel free to thwart the players as suits him.

Something Blue

The party has made it past the last of the royal guard, and find themselves entering a small, private chapel. Oil lamps along the walls provide ample light. A dinner tray, now emptied of food, decorates the altar space. Sitting together, holding hands, seemingly in deep conversation, are the Princess Grace and King Edmund. Edmund rises to his feet when he notices the party. His lack of height is now readily apparent.

"You would be a rescue party from Yandaway. Welcome to Barrowfell. I am Edmund." He looks at their weapons. "It seems you have had some trials, and I probably have quite a bit of work ahead to restock my forces. How unfortunate."

If the players attack straightaway, Edmund will position himself between the party and the princess. He cannot cast spells, but he is an experienced swordsman. Even in a fight, he will attempt to persuade the heroes to hear him out and

to learn the truth of recent events. That truth is as follows:

Edmund and Grace are desperately in love. They have been exchanging messages by carrier bird for many months. Though Grace was resigned to her fate, Edmund was determined that she have the opportunity to wed for love instead of statecraft. It took vast planning and power to send and return the kidnap team, and Grace tried even in the midst of it to avoid bloodshed. (Her screams of "No! No!" were attempts to dissuade her royal guards from futile violence.)

"And there you have it," the Princess says. "We have been here all the day and night, getting to know one another and confirming the truth of our love. We planned to be wed tomorrow, but now that you are here . . . well. Our fate rests in your hands."

King Edmund takes the Princess's hand again. "We are willing to respect your decision," he says.

And A Silver Sixpence In Her Shoe

If the players choose to fulfill their mission as specified, Edmund cautions them that he will not forget the pain they are about to cause him and his true love. "I do not promise revenge, but I do have a long memory and substantial resources." If Edmund is disabled or killed, he will be much more aggravated.

Edmund can, at the gamemaster's discretion, tempt the players. "What of the alliance? What about an alliance between Yandaway and Barrowfell, hmm? Ardwin hardly has the strategic position that I have here. Truly, if matters of state are what concern you, we are a better match than Grace and Rodrick could ever be."

Edmund can also offer sanctuary if the characters choose not to return to Yandaway. "Barrowfell is a rough land. Our winters are cold and our summers dry, but the land rewards those willing to work. And so do I."

King Edmund will reject any suggestion that he accompany the party back to plead his case in person. "I have far too many enemies, and few enough people trust my intentions as it is. After all, I am the Dark Necromancer-King, am I not?"

Gamemasters who wish to continue with adventures in the Six Kingdoms will want to acknowledge the repercussions of whatever decision the adventurers take.

Variations

"Wight Wedding" can be played in any genre, with appropriate adjustments. In a science fiction campaign, the Royal Pass becomes a teleport gate and Barrowfell becomes a capital ship or space station. Revenants become robots. In the modern world, the Royal Pass might be a supersonic transport, Barrowfell a skyscraper complex or a resort retreat, and the revenants cloned drones.

Characters

Revenant: Agility 2D, Coordination 1D, Physique 2D, lifting 3D, Intellect 1D, Acumen 1D, search 3D, tracking 3D, Charisma 2D, intimidation 4D. *Move:* 10. *Physique Damage:* 2D. *Body Points:* 15 / *Wound levels:* 2. *Disadvantages:* Employed (R3), slave to King Edmund. *Special Abilities:* Hardiness (R2), +2 to damage resistance totals; Immortality (R1), cease functioning when smashed to pieces or head is cut off. *Equipment:* short sword (damage +1D+2); knife (damage +1D); padded leather armor (Armor Value +1D) with helmet. *King Edmund's revenants are well-clothed, well-armored, and very well-preserved. They resemble normal soldiers in every way and have a lower Charisma score than the creepier skeletons or zombies.*

Officer: Agility 2D, dodge 3D, fighting 3D, melee combat 3D, Coordination 2D, Physique 3D, lifting 3D+1, running 3D+1, Intellect 2D, Acumen 2D, search 2D+1, streetwise 2D+1, survival 2D+1, Charisma 2D, intimidation 2D+2, mettle 2D+1. *Move:* 10. *Physique Damage:* 2D. *Fate Points:* 1. *Character Points:* 3. *Body Points:* 15 / *Wound levels:*

2. *Equipment*: short sword (damage +1D+2); knife (damage +1D); padded leather armor (Armor Value +1D) with helmet.

King Edmund: Agility 2D, melee combat 7D, dodge 6D, Coordination 3D, Physique 2D, Intellect 3D, healing 4D, reading/writing 4D, cultures 4D, speaking 4D, Acumen 2D+1, Charisma 2D+2, command 5D, intimidation 4D, mettle 4D, persuasion 4D, Extranormal: Magical 3D, alteration 4D, conjuration 6D, apportation 5D. *Advantages*: Authority (R3), ruler; Size: Small (R1), scale value of 3; Wealth (R3). *Disadvantages*: Hindrance: Shorter Stride, 2 meter reduction to running, swimming and jumping Move. *Move*: 8. *Physique Damage*: 2D. *Fate Points*: 0. *Character Points*: 0. *Body Points*: 15 / *Wound levels*: 2. *Equipment*: short sword (damage +1D+2); knife (damage +1D); padded leather armor (Armor Value +1D).

King Edmund is a handsome man of early middle-age, but only a little over 4 feet tall. He carries himself with great authority but little arrogance. He has used all his available Fate Points and Character Points to bring Princess Grace to him and has no magical wherewithal to defend himself presently. (Most of his spell expertise is in the care and management of revenants anyway.) Good thing he's a master swordsman.

Better, Stronger, Faster

Basic Cybernetics for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Matt Riggsby

Many cybernetic enhancements can be expressed easily in terms of GURPS advantages. For example, bioengineered implanted filters for extracting oxygen from water could easily be seen as just an instance of the Doesn't Breathe: Gills advantage, purchased for \$1,000 per point of advantage cost (per p. 295). However, some larger, more obvious prosthetics, such as artificial limbs are potentially more complex, incorporating a number of advantages, disadvantages, limitations, and enhancements. This article provides some guidance for people wanting to play cyberpunk campaigns with *GURPS Fourth Edition* by presenting stats for basic cybernetic limbs and sensory equipment.

Ground Rules

If a prosthetic limb enjoys an advantage or disadvantage which usually covers the entire body, it receives a -80% limitation: only applies to one body part. This can be seen as neatly dividing the body into five zones, each of which an advantage or disadvantage can be applied to at 20% of cost: left arm, right arm, left leg, right leg, and the torso and head combined. All external cybernetics, unless otherwise noted, partake of the Machine metatrait (p. 263).

Any society advanced enough to produce powered prosthetics can disguise them to the casual glance, if desired. Cybernetic appendages can be padded with foam and covered with flexible flesh-toned skins so that they'll resemble the wearer's own body parts. Only a closer examination will reveal their mechanical nature, and the covering provides no real protection (this is a zero-point effect). However, in most cyberpunk campaigns, wearers will want to emphasize their cyborg nature and dispense with such concealment.

Arms

A cheap or primitive cybernetic arm has, at best, rudimentary touch sensors, but also inflicts no pain if damaged, providing Numb (-20) and High Pain Threshold (10). The electronics are also on the fragile side and easily disrupted, giving the arm the Electrical disadvantage (-20). Taken together with the Machine metatrait (grand total -5 points) and the 80% discount for applying to a single limb, the basic arm is a -1 point disadvantage. For the purposes of monetary cost, but not advantage cost, the cost of fixing the One Arm disadvantage (-20) is included, bringing the cost of a low-end cybernetic arm to \$19,000.

Where available, characters will probably be interested in a number of options:

Option	Cost	Notes
Improved shielding	\$4,000	Eliminates Electrical
Improved touch sensors	\$2,000	Eliminates Numb and High Pain Threshold
Advances sensory filters	\$4,000	Eliminates Numb, but not High Pain Threshold
Additional ST	\$3,000/point of ST	
Improved hand control	\$5,000/point of DX	Treat as Manual Dexterity; this option requires either of the options buying off Numb
Overall improved control	\$12,000/point of DX	Treat as Additional Arm DX; this option requires either of the options buying off Numb

Legs

Like cybernetic arms, low-end cybernetic legs have Numb, High Pain Threshold, Electrical, and Machine (again, at -80% discount), and for the purposes of monetary but not advantage cost, the cost of fixing the *Lame: One Leg* disadvantage (-20) is included, bringing the cost of a basic cybernetic leg to \$19,000 or a -1 point disadvantage, the same as that of an arm. A pair costs \$38,000, or -2 points. Legs have many of the same options as arms, but since they're used primarily for locomotion, they're best bought in pairs.

Option	Cost	Notes
Improved shielding	\$4,000	Eliminates Electrical
Improved touch sensors	\$2,000	Eliminates Numb and High Pain Threshold
Advances sensory filters	\$4,000	Eliminates Numb, but not High Pain Threshold
Additional ST	\$3,000/point of ST	Improves Kicking damage for the effected leg, but not Move or Speed
Enhanced Move	\$5,000 per +1 to basic Move	This option requires <i>two</i> cybernetic legs. This cost is for the full enhancement, not a per-leg cost.
Enhanced Jump	\$10,000 per ×2 to jumping distance.	This option requires <i>two</i> cybernetic legs. This cost is for the full enhancement, not a per-leg cost.

Sensory Equipment

Unlike limbs, eyes and ears are typically bought in pairs, and the listed costs reflect that. A character could buy a single cybernetic eye or ear for half cost. However, if one eye has enhancements that the other doesn't, the wearer either loses the benefits (if he uses the eyes together) or effectively suffers from the *One Eye* disadvantage while he closes one eye and uses the other. If one ear has enhancements the other doesn't, the additional enhancements are only effective for sounds coming from that side (and *not* those coming from the front).

Cybernetic eyes and ears have Machine and Electrical; since they're mostly internal, it's assumed that any injury will transmit enough force to the surrounding tissue that the pain sensors of the replaced body parts are irrelevant. The cost of buying off Blindness (50 points) is included in the monetary but not point cost of eyes, bringing the base cost of a pair of cybernetic eyes to \$51,000, or a 1 point *advantage*. Cybernetic ears include the cost of buying off Deafness: \$21,000 or a 1 point advantage.

Primitive or cheaply produced eyes may have limited capabilities for a reduced cost:

Option	Cost	Notes
Color blind	-\$10,000	
Restricted vision	-\$15,000	
Tunnel vision	-\$30,000	
Poor resolution	-\$25,000	Treat as Nearsighted

At the GM's option, multiple disadvantages may be combined, or combined with the enhancements below (for example, cybernetic eyes which are color blind but have broad peripheral vision would cost \$51,000), but the minimum cost of a pair of eyes plus implantation is unlikely to fall below \$10,000.

Of course, there are also a number of enhancements available:

Option	Cost	Notes
Acute Vision	\$2,000/+1 to Vision rolls	
Night Vision	\$1,000/+1 against darkness penalties	

Peripheral vision	\$15,000	
Telescopic vision	\$5,000/level	
UV vision	\$10,000	
Glare filters	\$5,000	Treat as Protected Sense

Cybernetic ears have their own options:

Option	Cost	Notes
Acute Hearing	\$2,000/+1 to Hearing rolls	
Discriminatory Hearing	\$15,000	
Parabolic Hearing	\$4,000 per level	
Subsonic hearing	\$5,000	
Ultrahearing	\$5,000	
High-volume filters	\$5,000	Treat as Protected Sense

Interface Jack

GURPS describes a number of advantages related to plugging computer-related facilities into one's head (for example, Modular Abilities). However, it lacks clear direction for one prominent feature of cyberpunk: the interface jack, an implant allowing the user to operate computers and other devices via a direct neural link. How much it costs depends, of course, on what, exactly it does in the game setting.

A low-capacity interface jack allows operation of devices equipped for computer or mental control with no bonuses to that operation. Since it's simply an alternate means of control providing no consistent advantage, it's a one-point perk, or \$1,000.

A more powerful interface jack is described in **GURPS Cyberpunk** (p. C41). This jack provides a +4 to skill rolls for operating equipment thus controlled. This could be regarded as the equivalent of a +4 Talent for a group of skills including Boating, Computer Hacking, Computer Operation, Computer Programming, Driving, Electronics Operation, Piloting, Research, and Submarine. This is a medium-sized group of skills (10 points/level), but it has some limitations. First, it does not grant reaction bonuses and increased learning speed usually granted by the Talent advantage (-30%). Second, it has an Accessibility limitation: can only be used with devices equipped for neural control. How much of a limitation that is depends on the campaign, but in a typical cyberpunk campaign, -30% seems reasonable. Most computers can be directly interfaced, possibly with the addition of a special sensory interface deck, but vehicles and other equipment may not be routinely equipped for direct control. This makes an interface jack a 16 point advantage, or \$16,000.

Enhanced Battery Life

The Machine metatrait assumes that machine parts must be refueled or recharged periodically. This can be somewhat inconvenient for adventurers if they're traveling to areas where it's easier to get food than new batteries, so they may want to invest in better power sources. Any cybernetic enhancement can be provided with superior batteries or compact, high-endurance power plants that require less frequent recharging or refueling: \$1,000/1 point to recharge once a week, \$2,000/2 points for a permanent power source which essentially never needs recharging.

More Questions than Answers

The End

by Chris Aylott

The bookcases began to leave the store today. That's when it finally became real.

We bought these bookcases in the spring of 1995. Pine bookcases, unfinished. Sixteen tall cases, 10 short. We stained them a maple color and covered them with two layers of polyurethane, just to be sure. We nearly stunk out the Subway sandwich shop next door before they complained and we took the work outside. We worried that they weren't sturdy enough.

The cases I carried out the door today had their share of dings and scratches, but they were sturdy enough. They don't look that different from 10 years ago. I can't remember the name of the man who built the shelves anymore, but he built them well.

I don't look much different either. Same unruly hair, goatee instead of beard, slightly nicer clothes. I'm still using the state ID card I got when I was in college, and nobody ever looks at it twice. Why should they? I'm wearing a trenchcoat in the picture, and most winter days I'm still wearing the same coat.

A few dings and scratches, no big changes.

So why do I feel so old tonight?

Going South

If you missed the news, I'm the new Managing Editor at Steve Jackson Games. In less than a month, my family and I are packing up and moving 2,000 miles, from Northampton, Massachusetts to Austin, Texas. That means the store has to close.

We've been preparing for this for most of the summer. Truth is, we were going whether I got the job or not, either now or in the spring when our lease was up. The business was doing okay. Not fantastic, but "okay" has been good in a year of market consolidation and shaky game sales. But somewhere along the way . . . it stopped being fun. It got old. We got tired.

My younger self would never have been able to imagine that. Tired of selling books and games? Tired of having a store where you can play with stuff and call it a demonstration? Tired of hanging around among professional booksellers and gamers?

My younger self loved retail so much that I once declared that I didn't want to retire, that I wanted to be found slumped over the register one day.

What was I thinking?

Why didn't I understand that a job and a hobby don't make a life?

Our Shrinking World

It's not like the job sucks. On any given day, it's still fun to sell stuff. When I do get to demonstrate a game -- which isn't often enough, as I'm usually behind the register -- that's fun. I've mostly lost interest in the industry chatter, but

that's because I'm hearing the same spats and wishful thinking for the fifth time running. It doesn't usually bother me, because I can tune the chatter out.

Any given day is good. What wears you down is stringing the days together into every day. My wife and I have worked six days a week since we opened, with a few days off each year for a vacation or medical reasons. No weekends, no road trips of more than a few hours, and not many holidays. I missed my sister's wedding because I had to mind the store for a big ***Magic: the Gathering*** release. She got divorced a few years later, and I never actually met her husband.

That's not the only wedding my wife and I have missed. Then there are the conventions, the birthday parties, the dinners with friends. The years-long gaps between visits with parents. Working together kept the two of us close, but the work eroded our connections to friends and family. We didn't even have time for letters, and if it weren't for instant messaging and e-mail we might have lost most of the friends we still have.

Moving the store helped a little. The new location allowed one person to run the store while the other did errands or took some personal time. But we also became parents, and that was when the cracks in our life really started to show.

The World's Greatest Baby didn't suffer from spending her first year in a store. Quite the opposite; at 14 months she loves interacting with other people and is soaking up new words like a sponge. But the store is too limited an environment for her; I worry about what will happen if she can't explore other places. I worry about her grandparents, and whether she'll get to spend enough time with them as she grows up.

We could justify sacrificing our own time for the store. We couldn't justify sacrificing our daughter's childhood. And so we found another option.

Last Chance for Gas and Good-byes

They say the last month of a business is its best month. That's certainly true here. We're selling everything -- books, bookcases, tables and chairs -- and the money is rolling in faster than it does at Christmas. Now I know why shady rug dealers have "closing sales" every month; business is great when the customer thinks he's getting a last-chance bargain.

Ring up sales isn't what tires us out, though, not even at this pace. What's exhausting is the emotions that our customers bring in. A few of them are angry at us -- they feel betrayed because we're picking up our toys and going home. There's not much I can do or say about that. Most of them are happy for us but sad for themselves. They seem a little lost, telling us that they don't know how they're going to find the books they like without us. They seem to believe that this store is more than a place you can buy books, and maybe they're right.

(Lest I sound too big-headed, I should note that not all our visitors are fans. Search around the net a little and you'll find quite a few people who are happy to slag us off, some of them former friends. Some of our detractors don't like our selection, some of them don't like the choices we've made, and a *lot* of people don't like my attitude. To which I can only say that I give back the attitude I am given, and if I've acted like a jerk to you then there was probably a reason.)

I can sympathize with our customers' feelings, but I don't really know how to deal with them. I want to tell them how much I'll miss Northampton and the store, but the truth is that I won't. I'll miss some people and some things. But that mild sadness is overwhelmed by the joy I feel in picking up stakes and moving, in getting to do new things at work and at home, at spending lots of time with my parents for the first time since I stopped coming home from college. I can't be sad with them about leaving, because I'm too happy to go.

And then there are "the teenagers." Who aren't teenagers any more, really. The oldest are in their mid-20s now, out of college and establishing lives of their own. These are the kids that grew up in the store over 10 years, who played games in our back room and hung out and talked to us because they couldn't talk to their parents any more. They're the ones we're truly going to miss; the oldest ones have been coming back to say good-bye, and there have been a lot of

hugs and a few tears. But they don't need us any more, not really. Even the youngest ones are growing up, ready to move on to new things. To the rest of their lives.

It's hard to let go of the teenagers, harder than I can put into words. There's only one thing about leaving that can make me cry, and this is it. But at the same time it's the teenagers that make me realize how lucky Deb and Katherine and I are.

Lucky that we have each other, and a larger family that wants us to be near them.

Lucky that we have the money and the skills to do what we want with our lives.

Lucky that we're willing to walk away from a life that's not working for us and embrace something new.

Lucky that for 10 years we were able to change people's lives just a little bit for the better.

The End is The Beginning

In less than a month, my family and I are packing up and moving 2,000 miles, from one life to another. My head is already more than halfway into our new world; I open my e-mail now and it's full of manuscript comments, scheduling concerns, budget decisions to be made. I feel old when I look around the shop, but I feel like a kid when I look at the work ahead. There's so much to do, so many possibilities, so many new things to learn.

Being the Managing Editor is going to keep me busy, and there's no way I'll be able to organize my scattered brain into a column on a monthly basis. (As it is, this final installment is horribly late, and threatening to spoil The Mighty SMarsh's honeymoon. He's going to be guilt tripping me for months about this, and I'll deserve it every time.) *[Editor's Note: Honeymoon? What's that? I'm editing this at GenCon, an hour before I need to set up a booth . . .]* But I don't think it's right to leave a job without a successor in place, and that's why I'm pleased to introduce you to Heather Barnhorst.

Heather is a manager at one of the largest game stores in the country, a columnist for *Comics and Games Retailer* and other trade publications, a consultant to a host of aspiring game companies, and a good friend. I wrote about her [back in November](#), and I'm amazed at what she's been able to do to turn a guy's hobby into a family hobby. I'm looking forward to what she has to say about the game business, and by this time in September I'm sure you will be too.

As for me, you'll know where to find me. (Just look for the office with the flaming skulls and the screaming writers.) Thanks for your time, thanks for your thoughts, and thank you for loving this hobby as much as I do.

Unblink Your Eyes at the Sweeping Change

To call the last couple of weeks hectic would be a gross understatement, merely drawing attention to the calendars full of weeks that had been previously labeled "hectic" that are now revealed to be nothing more than lemonade-sipping seven-days spans that stare at the sky and try to decide if a particular cloud looks more like a bat or an elephant. I've been busy.

Fortunately, my wedding day went off without a hitch (well, okay . . . one important hitch), and the special wedding-themed issue was well-received, making my mom, stepmom, and fiancée cry. So to everyone who helped make that issue happen, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Anyway, after the wedding, we had one brief evening at an incredibly nice hotel room (one where Tip O'Neal slept in); then, 10 hours later, we were on the road again, eventually ending up in our new home. Twenty-eight hours later, we were in a car again, on the way to GenCon for business, as usual.

So I'm sure the week has been awash with changes, but I haven't had a chance to sit back and enjoy them yet. However, at one point I *did* get to watch one of my *Mystery Science Theater 3000* tapes ("Last of the Wild Horses"); that episode contains an extensive homage to *Star Trek's* "Mirror, Mirror" episode. And that episode -- coupled with the sweeping changes I'm awaiting for my life once I get a moment to tie my shoes, and the changing of the guard for our own retail-inspired columnist -- are what have inspired this installment.

There are, *very* broadly speaking, three core genres (or more specifically, periods): Fantasy, Modern, and Sci-Fi. Obviously, these form the trinity of past, present, and future, and form the conceptual basis for the new **D6 System** as well as the **d20 System**.

One common element that stories set in these three broad categories have is the idea of the sweeping [change](#) -- the moment when reality melts away from what it was to what it is now. (I'm sure there are other types of elements that are common to all three, but I'm just focusing on one. Work with me, here.) The idea of the sweeping "before your eyes" change is primarily a visual one, which is why it seems most common in movies and television shows: examples include black and white changing to color in *Wizard of Oz*, the sweep of changing weather in any modern adventure-disaster movie, or the "good" world changing to an evil or darker one in *Star Trek* (or its *Next Generation* successor). In a broader sense, though, it's relatively common in other media and stories: returning in the time travel device to find one's home devastated, activating a magical curse that turns the kingdom bleak and dying, or finding out your guardian angel seems to have transformed your beloved town into a dystopian nightmare.

The mechanics behind the sweeping change varies from genre to genre, but the most common are:

- time travel (including that one-way form of time travel known as "moving into the future")
- magic
- "reality altering" powers (in other words, psionic magic)
- altered states of consciousness (it's a dream/it's a hallucination/you're in the matrix)

Although these sweeping changes are common to almost all genres and stories, they have several things in common:

The change is usually for the worse. While I think it would be a neat one-off story to have the heroes discover a sweeping change that has affected everything, and have that change be relatively beneficial (or even entirely so), the usual trend is for the sweeping change to be at best a step in an unusual direction, and at worse a plunge into the abyss of badness.

The protagonists remember the way things are supposed to be, but no one else does. Or, if they do, no one else is in a position to do anything about it (but the heroes are). In fact, it's as common as not that the rest of the world don't even know or remember the heroes. (Again, there's story potential for a sweeping change where everyone remembers how things used to be.)

There are usually immediately recognizable elements that have been transformed. It's rare for a transformed world to be utterly unrecognizable (although not impossible -- the original *Planet of the Apes* springs to mind, although its ending centers around recognition of a famous pre-transformation element). Even something as "alien" as the Kansas/Oz transformation has the recognition of Kansanian elements as a plot point. ("Gosh, you're just like my cowardly friend back home!") While it's possible to have the world be something totally unfamiliar, it's usually more resonant to have some familiar element(s) from the pre-transformed world that can be a reminder of the prior world. Thus the Golden Gate Bridge might be transformed into a massive vine-and-plant construct, the optimistic holopod entertainment chamber might be transformed into a deadly holographic combat training ground, or the knight's favorite magical sword might turn into a push-button energy-blade weapon.

There are usually approachable elements of "the normal" -- the status quo of this transformed world. These serve either to throw off the protagonist or to exemplify why this world is different than normal. For example, a seemingly hard-luck street urchin who turns out to be a deadly assassin might exemplify how this world has hardened everyone, such that there is no innocence anymore. For aficionados of interactive fiction, the classic Infocom adventure *A Mind Forever Voyaging* -- which focuses on a computer's simulation of various points in the near-future -- relies on many of these types of approachable elements to tell the story.

If there's one conceptual element that distinguishes the "modern" era from its feudal or classical predecessors, it's the idea of the future. While in times of old it was common to know that your children's children would die in a world roughly the same as the one you were born into, nowadays it's common to see the world change before one's eyes several times in a lifetime. As a wise person who I'm too lazy to look up once said, "[The future ain't what it used to be.](#)" And the idea of the future and change can most easily collide when a sweeping change is introduced.

In the meantime, I eagerly await the sweeping change of a roadtrip home, and more than two days straight in my own bed.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Eberron Deluxe Dungeon Master's Screen (for *Dungeons & Dragons*)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Development & Assembly by Christopher Perkins

Four-panel referee's screen, map of Khorvaire, full color; \$14.95

This may be the longest anyone's ever gone between putting out a game and following it up with a GM's screen, but if you're a fan of the **Eberron** setting from Wizards of the Coast, your secrets are now safe with them.

The **Eberron Deluxe Dungeon Master's Screen** is a four-panel affair, with most of what you'd expect from it. In the center are the charts you need most often. Actions take up the bulk of the right, and modifiers most of the left. In a digestible format, they repeat what you can do, how long it takes, and whether it provokes an attack of opportunity from your enemies. In a similar vein they list skills, whether they can be used untrained or without interference by armor, such. They've also managed to slip a bit of campaign color in on you by labeling the months and the days of the week.

The aforementioned modifiers apply variously to combat and related matters (turning undead), but also bonuses and penalties for climbing and listening. Interacting with NPCs is stuck at the bottom, and this panel's local flavor is the dragonmarks (mystic tattoos that signify natural skill with certain abilities) of the various houses.

The farther left you go, the more the scenery takes it on the chin. If you want to break something, this panel will tell you how to go about it. Travel right, and you've found all things movement, including a tangentially related segue from the previous panel for spot checks and the even less-related *detect magic* and *evil*. Oh, and the almost pointless light sources chart. Everything has a page reference, so if you need context or the screen just doesn't provoke enough arguments, you can quickly find both the book and page you need.

On the other side, to give the players something other than a blank page to stare at, is the traditional artwork. This one's got another fight scene, deep in a jungle, with combatants from vaguely defined sides (who's that bat-like thing working with the humans?). It's busy and pretty, if not outrageously inspiring.

The shield uses "landscape" format, which is to say the screen panels are the size of a page, but they're laid on their side so it's about half as tall; the DM has privacy but he can still see his friends. The short stature lets it use a neat graphic conceit: Anyone familiar with the **Eberron** product line knows the covers stylistically limit the illustration to the middle third of the book, letting it wrap around front and back. The art used here is like one of those products, peeled off, extended either direction, and squished into the sheet for a nifty effect.

It may not matter to the average consumer, but the screen folds out from the middle like wings (or, if you prefer, the right and left ends fold toward the middle when you're done with it). What might matter to buyers is that you get shorted a little on the end panels -- they're not quite eight-and-a-half inches each, so don't expect the full 44" spread.

If you're waiting to hear about the booklet that customarily comes with the screen, you'll have to take the map. Khorvaire, the continent of choice for starting one's **Eberron** campaigns, fills the layout, and it's rather nice. It looks good on your gaming room wall, and labels all the points of interest (which are, in turn, accompanied by a master key so you know the size of every one-griffin town for miles). It's the same illustration from page 135 of the **Campaign Setting** core book, measuring about 32" by 20". It's bigger, but not precisely the same. You can find a city here or there that's a little further north than it was originally (and some minor graphic changes, like the lines used to demark this road or that rail). The advertising copy wrapped around the whole thing claims this map has details on sites not

previously available. This is an exercise for the consumer; a brief comparison of the two shows no additions.

It might be more of an aesthetic choice, stacking the ***Eberron Deluxe Dungeon Master's Screen*** against the other shields available for ***Dungeons & Dragons***. Do you prefer tall and thin, or short and wide? There's not much new or changed here -- a few charts for skill checks and sample difficulties left out, a couple of ***Eberron***-specific lists put in - and not all the inclusions make sense. Would you rather have the months of the year, or prefer they add in rule-oriented items like a sadly absent bit about the use of action points? Whatever you choose, this screen is sturdy enough in function, stock, and quality to make it an even call.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

Vampire: The Requiem (for the World of Darkness Storytelling System)

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

Written by Ari Marmell, Dean Shomshak, & C.A. Suleiman with Justin Achilli, Carl Bowen, John Chambers, & Matthew McFarland

Illustrated by Sam Araya, Daren Bader, Tim Bradstreet, Brom, Avery Butterworth, Pauline Benney, Shane Coppage, Marko Djurdjevic, Fred Hooper, Travis Ingram, Alex Maleev, Ken Meyer JR, Mark A. Nelson, Michael Phillippi, Jeff Rebner, Jean-Sebastien Rossbach, Mattias Snygg, Rich Thomas, Josh Gabriel Timbrook, Andy Trabbold, Conan Venus, & Cathy Wilkins

Cover by matt milberger

306-Page Black & White Hardback; \$35

Considering how big *Vampire: the Masquerade* has been since 1991, it is no surprise that White Wolf launched the all-new World of Darkness with a new version of its flagship title. *Vampire: The Requiem* is as an attractive shiny red hardback, its cover given a pleasingly tactile matte-gloss cover. The good looks continue inside, with finely executed red tones. The writing, like that of *The World of Darkness Storytelling System Rulebook*, shows every effort of being made conceptually both accessible and lucid. And in the reading, it is clear that the "hipper than thou" attitude of previous games is also gone.

From the title onwards, this appears to be a changed game. Not "Masquerade," but "Requiem," referring to the change in the nature of vampiric existence. While also a Mass or Dirge for the dead, the Kindred describe their un-existence as the Requiem, a grandiose waltz in which they are in turn, guided, manipulated, and inspired to dance. This is a far more precarious existence, vampires confined to the cities by an instinctive fear of the open countryside; prone to outbursts of rage from the Beast within that separates them from mortal man; and as they cling tenaciously to their barely remembered mortality, they are forced to exist alongside the only thing that understands this existence -- other vampires. This stands in direct paradox with the vampire as a solitary predator by nature. The Masquerade still continues though, the traditions of secrecy being what keeps the Kindred hidden from Kine.

The strained, fractious relationships in vampire society are referred to as the "Danse Macabre." This is as much a distraction from the Requiem and the predatory urges of the Beast, as it fulfills a vampire's need for social contact. The Danse Macabre might seem predicated upon dominance over others, but is really concerned with the acquisition of influence and leverage, in both vampire and mortal society. The constant infighting and manoeuvring for both is dominated by the Elders of vampire society, who have been at the game for longer.

But even Elder influence extends only as far as the city edge, rarely beyond. For in *Vampire: The Requiem* there is no over-arching conspiracy to keep vampires hidden; the Camarilla existed in Roman times but no longer, lost to the vagaries of vampiric history; however, arguably its feudal structure remains, as does its traditions. What then of the clans?

Rather than the seven or the 13, ***Vampire: The Requiem*** has just five. Here the game begins its reuse of old words for new and old concepts under new terms. Thus the five clans are the Nosferatu (outcasts), the Gangrel (savages), the Ventrue (nobility), who are joined by the Daeva (sensualists, or Toreador renamed), and the Mekhet, a combination of the Lasombra and Tremere as shadow-dwelling perfectionists. If a clan is a vampire's family, then his Covenant represents his social allegiance, objectives, politics, and theology in one. Again there are five, of which some can be freely joined, others having requirements. The Carthian Movement seeks to modernize vampire politics and society, while the Invictus wishes to retain and rule the current situation. The Circle of Crone are pagans venerating a number of female figures, while the Lancea Sanctum is more like a church, believing vampires to be descended from Longinus, the legionary damned at the Crucifixion. Finally, the Ordo Dracul is another mystical society, concerned with transcending the kindred state. Two other Covenants are described, neither of which is available to player characters as they either hate vampires or are Satanists. Characters without Covenant, the unaligned or unbound, are generally looked down upon.

To reflect that characters are mortals first and then vampires, players create mortals from the rules found in ***the World of Darkness Storytelling System Rulebook***, then add elements found in this book. This includes not just new Merits, but also an attribute bonus and various disciplines determined by a character's clan and covenant. Where the mortal possessed Morality, after his Embrace he has Humanity, a measure of what he remembers of being mortal and which is easily lost. Instead of the previous game's Generation, a character's Blood Potency determines the mystical strength of the vitae in his veins, setting limits on his blood pool size, the blood that can be expended, and the maximum level of attributes, skills, and disciplines. Beginning at 1, Blood Potency can increase over time, experience, and through Diablerie, which results in the loss of Humanity and possible infliction of a mental derangement. More interesting is the fact that Blood Potency can be lost when a vampire enters into Torpor for any length of time.

Again Disciplines mixes the old and the new, and even the new draw on previously seen abilities. That said, they have been reworked in line with both the mechanics and feel of the new Storytelling System. The core mechanic is that of attribute plus skill plus Discipline level, and in every case is clearly explained. Blood Potency also determines the maximum level of a Discipline that a vampire can learn or be taught.

Another character option comes in the first appendix: Bloodlines. While together Clan and Covenant allow flexibility in character generation, Bloodlines increases this by allowing some characters that have diverged away from their Clan. Again five are given, along with associated Disciplines. The first of the five are the Bruja, vicious Gangrel sired by a punk biker and operating only in the American Southwest. Buruamin are Japanese Nosferatu, Malkovians (not Malkavians) are mad Ventrue descended from a 19th century asylum inmate, the Toreador are even more cultured Daeva, and the Morbus are plague-bearing Mekhet. In addition to the advantage, weakness, and Discipline of their parent Clan, each Bloodline comes with an associated weakness and another Discipline. Bloodlines cannot be joined straight off and it is later possible for a character to create a Bloodline of his own, but gaining recognition for it is another matter. The appendix also includes notes on how to create new Disciplines.

The nature and use of blood or Vitae is explored in depth, many of the actions in the previous game have been made more difficult, from siring a Childe to creating and maintaining a Ghoul. Vitae also has an addictive quality, whether that of the vampire's own or another vampire, which of course can lead to the Vinculum, a bond over the feeding vampire or mortal. Further, Blood ties are stronger between connected vampires, allowing bonuses when using certain Disciplines on members of the same linear family.

The setting emphasizes the politics and scheming within a neo-feudal government ruling over one city or another. While other forms of government are suggested, including the corporate board room, the democracy espoused by the Carthian Movement, the church Diocesan, and so on, these rarely prove workable; in most cases, an autocratic Prince rules advised by a council of Primogen. This set up is reflected in the second appendix, a fully described location. This is New Orleans, where it is relatively easy to maintain the Masquerade. For the last three decades the city has been dominated by three factions, each connected to an aspect of mortal society. The formal prince has ties to city businesses, his immediate rival is a charismatic politician with fingers in the criminal underworld operating out of the French Quarter, and the third is the mysterious Baron Cimitiere, a Houngan with a large mortal flock. The situation in New Orleans is described in 25-pages, but the Storyteller will find that it is not quite ready to play, the characters and

the objectives of the players needing to be worked in.

What the description of New Orleans reflects is a scaling back of the game's focus from worldwide to the cityscape and the dropping of a theme with the reset. ***Vampire: the Masquerade*** was described as a Gothic Punk game, but in ***Vampire: the Requiem***, the Punk element has been excised. New Orleans is perfect for that given the popularity of the Anne Rice novels. The focus on character has also shifted; no longer is a vampire the cool immortal, but a monster ruled by the Beast within. Indeed, this Beast is recognized between vampires as the "Predator's Taint" that sees each other as direct rivals and prone to Frenzy.

As a book, ***Vampire: the Requiem*** does have a problem or two. Many of its elements are difficult to find in a hurry, and the index doesn't really help. The book could have done with a few more antagonist descriptions, but perhaps the lack reflects the game's introverted nature. It also feels overwritten, even verbose in places, but much is also clearly explained and easily grasped. The storytelling advice is certainly not bad, but it does not offer anything new or different either.

The end result is that ***Vampire: the Requiem*** does not feel like a wholly new game, the reuse of so many elements a contributing factor. Yet it feels better -- even more stylish after a radical streamlining -- and possesses greater flexibility, at least in terms of character generation. The effect is less sterile than ***Vampire: the Masquerade***, perhaps languorous, and entirely the better for it. Not wholly new, nor wholly old, ***Vampire: The Requiem*** is still an effectively executed and accessible retelling of a landmark game.

--*Matthew Pook*

Lockwork

for *GURPS*

by S. E. Mortimer

*"A zealous lock-smith died of late,
And did arrive at heaven's gate,
He stood without and would not knock,
Because he meant to pick the lock."
-- William Camden, locksmith, 1605.*

The subject of locks covers thousands of years and many technological advancements -- from simple mechanical locking devices to electronic devices used today. This article concentrates on mechanical locks -- i.e. those devices that a character with the **GURPS** Lockpicking skill (p.B206) might be able to compromise. Attempts have been made to keep as consistent as possible with related **GURPS** material including *Basic Set Fourth Edition* and *Covert Ops*.

Introduction

Ever since the first door was invented there existed a need to prevent it from being opened. Locks were not only meant for security; they were a sign of wealth. The key became a strong symbol of authority, security, and power. In some cultures the number of keys carried was a direct measure of social status. Some locks were elaborately decorated and some keys were cut with intricate designs. Sometimes this was meant to deceive potential intruders as to the complexity of the lock they fitted -- a complicated key implied a complicated lock. There have only been two main methods used to obtain security from mechanical locks and keys. One is by means of fixed obstructions, called "wards" (see below), to prevent wrong keys from entering or turning in the lock. The other method employs moveable pins or "tumblers," which must be moved in a prearranged position by the key before it may be turned. The best locks use a combination of both wards *and* tumblers.

Security Measures

What follows is a brief list of the most common devices used to make locks more difficult to compromise.

Tumblers (TL1): A series of pins that fall down into notches in the lock. Small tumblers are spring-loaded, larger ones rely on gravity. A key lifts the tumblers up to a predetermined height, thus freeing the locking mechanism.

Wards (TL2): The simplest security measure. It is basically an obstruction that the key must slide past. The key needs to be cut so that it has slots in the bit -- basically a negative image of the ward(s). The simplest wards were small protrusions in the keyhole. Unless the key had slots in the same places it could not enter the keyhole. Internal wards are usually circular -- the slots in the key fit over the wards and follow them around as the key is rotated. Wards are made from thin metal plate silver soldered together in the ward case. The delicate work requires similar tools and skills as the jeweler.

Barrel Pin (TL2): A key with a hollow barrel is needed to fit over this pin. It serves as an obstruction to lockpicking and renders it more difficult to make a duplicate key. Some pins were not circular, meaning that a barrel key would

Lock Components

Strike Plate: The door jamb is hollowed out and the strike plate is fitted over the top. It has a hole the same shape as the cross-section of the bolt. When the bolt slides into, and engages the strike plate, the mechanism is considered to be "locked."

Bolt: This is the metal bar that engages the strike plate. It has a notch for the end of the key (the "bit") to slip into. The key bit acts as a rotating lever. If the key is turned in one direction the bolt slides into the strike plate. If it is turned the

not fit over the pin unless it was the same shape. In these instances, the barrel pin must rotate along with the key.

Concealable Keyhole (TL3): If the keyhole cannot be accessed, the lock cannot be opened. Keyhole covers were commonly used in the past to make the keyhole harder to find. Locating it requires a Quick Contest of the intruder's Vision or Search vs the maker's Camouflage skill (one minute per attempt). Some keyhole covers are hinged and spring-loaded. They must be released with an attachment on the same key that is needed to unlock the door -- usually located on the bow of the key. If one does not have the correct key then two lockpicking rolls are needed (after a successful Search roll finds the keyhole). One skill roll to release the keyhole cover (usually a fairly simple operation: +4 to +6), and another roll to pick the lock itself.

Detector Tumblers (TL5): Patented by Jeremiah Chubb in 1818, this feature makes the tumbler lock (see above) very difficult to pick. If any of the tumblers are raised too high, a special "detector tumbler" is activated and jams the bolt. The bolt cannot be moved again until the correct key is inserted and rotated to the "locked" position. This resets the detector tumbler. The key can then be rotated as normal to unlock the lock. This feature has the additional benefit of alerting the keyholder if someone attempts to tamper with his lock. If the first lockpicking attempt fails, the detector tumbler activates, and no further lockpicking attempts can be made until the detector tumbler is deactivated with the correct key, or a Lockpicking roll at -4 succeeds.

Locksmithing

Locksmiths were skilled metalworkers -- more akin to jewelers than blacksmiths. A locksmith needs the Engineer (Clockwork) skill (p.B190) to design and build locks, and construct a master key. Most locksmiths also have the Lockpicking skill (p.B206) so they can open locks and produce keys for locks to which they don't have the master key. Simple keys can be made by cutting slots into the bit with a jeweler's saw. More complicated keys are made from brass using "lost wax" casting. To build a custom-made lock, the GM assigns a modifier equal to the complexity of the lock to be attempted. For example, If the locksmith wishes to build a lock that gives a -2 vs. lockpicking attempts, then he needs to make a skill roll with a -2 modifier. It takes many days to make complicated locks. A basic lock with a modifier of +4 or more only takes a single day. It requires an additional day for every -1 to the modifier. E.g. a lock with a +0 modifier takes 5 days to manufacture. Poorly assembled locks don't fit snugly together, allowing more play between the components, and making them much easier to pick. A successful skill roll produces a lock of the required complexity and a matching key. On a critical success, the lock complexity is increased by 1 point. On a failed roll, the complexity of the lock is reduced by 1 point for every point by which the roll failed. For example, if the locksmith attempted a -2 lock and failed his skill roll by 3 points, then he creates a lock with a +1 complexity. On a critical failure the lock will fall apart the first time someone attempts to pick it.

Keys: As stated above, a successful Engineer (Clockwork) skill roll produces a master key to match the lock that the locksmith made. Once the master key is made, it is a simple matter to produce duplicates. It doesn't require any skill rolls to make additional keys if the master key (or an impression) is available.

other direction it slides out again. The notch needs to be symmetrical so the key bit can engage the bolt from both directions.

Lock Plate: This is the thin metal plate that fits over the locking mechanism on the outside. It has a keyhole to allow the key to be inserted. It is often the only part of the lock that is visible.

The Key

Bow: The "handle" of the key. It is wide and flat enabling it to be easily turned in the fingers. Larger keys have bows that are big enough to be gripped with two hands.

Shank: The long, thin length between the handle and the bit.

Shoulder: A section of the shank is widened into a collar to prevent the key from being inserted too far. Shoulders are generally only needed for keys that need to be inserted from both sides of a door.

Throat: The small section of the shank between the shoulder and the bit.

Bit: The part of the key that engages the bolt. It has slots or "cuts" so it may fit into the tumblers and/or wards of the lock.

Post: Also called a "pilot." It is the part of the shank that extends past the bit to help steady the key as it is inserted and keeps it centered.

Barrel: also called a "drill." Some keys have hollow ends that fit over a pin in the lock. The pin acts as an obstruction

To make a key without the master key requires significant study time and the Lockpicking skill. If the lock can be disassembled then it takes 1 hour for a lock with a complexity of +2 or more, and an additional hour for every point of complexity. For example, it takes three hours to make a key for a +0 lock. If the lock cannot be disassembled then the keymaker must work largely by "feel" (and peering through the keyhole). It takes *days* rather than hours to make a key this way. Thus it takes three days (working eight hours per day) to make a key for a +0 lock. During this time the character must have constant access to the lock being studied. No skill roll is required to make a key but the character must have the Lockpicking skill at expert level (14+). Every point of skill above this level reduces the amount of time taken by one day (minimum one day). For example, if someone has a Lockpicking skill of 18 and wishes to make a key for a -6 lock, it would take him five days if he couldn't disassemble the lock and 5 hours if he could.

to picking tools and a guide to keep the key centered.

Locks Throughout the Ages

Knots (TL0): Doors could be lashed closed with rope and secured with a complicated knot that only the owner knew how to tie. One example is the famous "Gordian knot" of Alexander's time. The only real advantage of this system is that the owner will know if his door has been tampered with. Someone truly intent upon entering will simply cut the rope (as Alexander did). To enter without using a blade requires the Knot Tying skill, rather than Lockpicking. This is resolved with a Contest of Skills between the knot tier and the untier. Success enables the knot to be untied and the door opened. To retie the rope using exactly the same knot requires a skill roll with a penalty of -5 if one is not familiar with the knot (modified by +2 for Eidetic Memory and +5 for Photographic Memory; p.51 of the **Basic Set**).

Cord & Bolt (TL0/TL1): A wooden cross beam (TL0) dropped into sockets, or metal bolt (TL1) slid into staples, was used to bar the inside of the door. It was "unlocked" from the inside by lifting or drawing it back. To do this from the outside, two cords were tied to the bolt and passed through holes in the door. Pulling one cord locked the door, pulling the other one unlocked it. If you are inside and want to prevent the door from being unlocked, simply pull in the cords. An intruder would need some sort of tool that he could poke through the hole, hook the cord, and pull it out. A successful DX roll would be enough to accomplish this. A latch or bolt is very simple to make requiring the Woodworking skill (if made of wood) or Smith skill (if made of metal). If the owner is out then he is likely to conceal the cord. An intruder would need to find the cord (Quick Contest: Vision or Search vs Camouflage). Adding a false cord or two would be a good means of trapping this lock. If the wrong cord is tugged, the trap is activated.

Cord & Bolt with Key (TL0/TL1): Similar to the above except that the second cord is attached to a key rather than being permanently attached to the bolt. The door has a hole in it level with the bolt, through which a cord is threaded. Pulling this cord locks the door from the outside. In order to unlock the door, the bolt-cord is threaded through the key and the key is pushed through the hole. Then, both cords are used together to unlock the door and the key is retrieved from the inside. As above, to make one of these locks requires the Woodworking or Smith skill. In order to pick this type of lock, an object is needed that can fit through the hole. If a suitable piece of wood is available then a Woodworking skill roll can be made to fashion a duplicate key. Roll once per minute at -1. A successful roll means that a piece of wood has been whittled to the right shape. Even a poor wood carver should be able to make a serviceable key in 5-10 minutes if he has access to the lock.

Bolt & Tumbler (TL1): This first originated in the Middle East near modern day Iraq but it quickly spread. It was widely used by the Egyptians. This lock is similar to the Cord & Bolt except that it has a hole through the bolt and a vertical pin -- the *tumbler*. When the bolt was drawn into the locked position, the tumbler would fall down into the hole, securing the lock. The bolt could not be moved again until the tumbler was released. If the bolt was on the outside of the door, then the tumbler needed to be concealed. The tumbler could be poked with a finger, pushing it up out of the hole. This released the bolt, allowing it to be slid open with the finger still in the hole. If one was familiar with this type of lock, then the main challenge to opening it is finding the concealed tumbler (Quick Contest: Vision or Search vs Camouflage). If the latch was on the inside of the door then a hole or slot was needed in the door to allow a person to put his hand through to find the hole in the bolt. A simple trap for this lock would be to include a false tumbler next to the real one. If one was not familiar with the lock then there would be a 50% chance that the wrong tumbler would be depressed, setting off the trap.

A more advanced (TL2) version of this lock is to make the hole and tumbler too small to be released with a finger. These locks required a piece of metal to slip through the door and up into the bolt. If the hole was irregularly shaped then the key needed to be fashioned with the same cross-section. This is the simplest type of lock that requires the Lockpicking skill and has a Complexity of +8.

Multiple Tumblers (TL2): An advanced version of the bolt & tumbler. This lock consists of a bolt with multiple tumblers that drop down through holes in the bolt. A special toothbrush-shaped key is pushed through a slot or hole in the door and lifted up into the holes. Each prong on the key pushes up a different tumbler, thus freeing the bolt, which is unlocked by using the key to slide it sideways along the slot in the door. The door is locked in the same fashion, by sliding the key in the other direction. To pick this type of lock, all of the tumblers need to be lifted up simultaneously. This lock has a Complexity of +5 to +7 depending on the number of tumblers.

Bolt & Barb-spring (TL2): In this type of lock, the bolt was secured by one or more V-shaped springs that spread out against the staples, preventing the bolt from moving. The key is relatively flat with prongs or hooks on its end. It is inserted through a horizontal slit (the keyhole), turned in a quarter circle, and then pulled back. The pulling action brings the key prongs to bear on the springs, making them lie flat. With the springs clear of the staples the key can now be used to slide the bolt back, unlocking the door. This type of lock seems to have been commonly used by the Romans and Chinese and was used up until fairly recent times in Scandinavia. Complexity ranges from +4 to +6.

Barb-spring Padlock (TL2): The barb-spring padlock is similar in operation to the bolt and barb-spring lock. Unlike today's padlocks, the shackle was separate from the body. On the shackle's lower side was a pair of spreading springs. These entered the body of the lock through a hole. When the shackle was pressed in fully, the springs, which were gradually closed up during insertion, spread out inside the body, holding the shackle in place. To remove the shackle the springs had to be compressed again. This was done with an L-shaped key, which was pushed into the keyhole in the body. This type of padlock was used by both the Romans and the Chinese. Lock complexity ranges from +4 to +6.

Rotary Lock (TL2): First developed by the Greeks. Instead of pressing the key up against the tumblers, the keys in these locks were rotated. Initial keys were sickle-shaped and a key would work on any lock if it was of a similar size. If the key was turned in one direction the bolt slid into the strike plate, locking it. If turned in the opposite direction, the bolt slid the other way, unlocking it. Once the rotary lock had been perfected, other locks that relied on sliding or pushing the key had given way to turning, and tumblers stopped being used in favor of wards (see *Security Measures*, above). The shapes of keys came to resemble those of today being either hollow (called a "barrel" or "drill") to fit over a fixed pin in the lock (the "lock pin"), or solid with a projecting end (called a "post" or "pilot") which fitted into a socket in the backplate of the lock.

More advanced rotary locks (TL3) had hollow lock pins with rotating bearings on both ends and keys were fluted to fit. Complexity for basic rotary locks is +7. For warded rotary locks, complexity ranges from +2 to +6. Warded rotary locks were the most common type of lock in Medieval Europe.

Combination Lock (TL4): These have been around since at least the 17th century in Europe and even earlier in China. There are several types:

Dial Combination: Used most often on safes. It consists of a small dial on the outside with a marker and numbers (usually 0-99) located around the circumference. The dial needs to be spun multiple times in both directions aligning the marker with a different number each time until the lock opens. On the inside there are a number of discs, each with a notch cut into it. Each disc has a knob called a "fly" on its sides. The first wheel spins until its fly makes contact with the wheel adjacent to it, causing it also to spin. This continues until all the wheels are spinning (called "picking up the wheels"). When the dial is rotated in the correct sequence, the bolt or bolts are able to slide through the gap provided by the aligned notches in the discs, enabling it to be locked or unlocked. For more on dial combinations, see *Safe Cracking*, below.

Disc Combination: Used on briefcases, padlocks, bicycle chains, etc. This lock consists of a number of thick discs which are numbered on their outside edge. Behind one of the numbers on the inside of each disc is a notch. When these notches are aligned the bolt can be slid freely, locking or unlocking the mechanism. These are fairly easy to

crack -- complexity ranges from +3 to +6.

Push button: On the outside of the lock is a panel with multiple numbered buttons (usually nine). Inside the lock is a grid through which the tumbler on the back of the each button secures the bolt. Each tumbler has a notch cut into it. The notches on those numbers which don't form part of the combination already line up with the grid. The notches on the combination numbers are not aligned, so these buttons need to be pressed. When all the notches align with the grid it can move freely, enabling the mechanism to be locked and unlocked. If the wrong button is pressed, its notch is no longer aligned with the grid, so it remains locked. A common method of picking this lock is to carefully examine the buttons. Those buttons that are regularly pushed should appear more worn than the others. Since it doesn't matter which order the buttons are pressed, it is a simple matter to open the lock by pressing the worn buttons. If the buttons are not worn, a Lockpicking roll is needed. Complexity of push button combination locks ranges from +2 to +4.

Lever Tumblers (TL5): A tumbler is a falling pin that prevents the bolt from moving and the earliest types of tumbler locks have been described above. They fell into disuse after the development of rotary locks that relied on wards for security. In simple lever tumbler locks the tumbler is lifted by the key and the bolt can be moved by further rotation of the key. Small locks require springs to hold the tumblers down but larger locks only needed gravity. The lever tumbler was invented in 1778 by Robert Barron. This lock had a bolt with a slot into which a pivoted tumbler had to be lifted exactly the right height. Too high or too low and it cannot be unlocked. Lock Complexity ranges from +0 to +4.

Cylinder Pin Tumbler Lock (TL5): These are the most common type of lock used in the world today. It had been developed by Linus Yale and his son in the second half of the 19th century. The first models had the tumblers built into the case of the lock. A later development built the tumblers into the cylinder and reduced it to the size of locks today. These locks enabled the combination of external wards and internal tumblers in one mechanism. Earlier keys were flat but later ones were corrugated, and today we use keys that are "paracentric." The most common type of lock today is the five-pin tumbler. Lock complexity is extremely varied depending on the quality and age of the lock, ranging anywhere from -4 to +6.

Wafer Lock (TL6): Used on desks, filing cabinets, car doors, coin operated machines, etc. It is similar to the tumbler lock except that spring loaded discs, called "wafers" are used instead of pins. The wafers have a slot cut through the middle to enable a key to be inserted. There is no need for a bolt since the wafers themselves perform that function. The mechanism is locked when the wafers extend outside the lock's housing. The correct key forces all the wafers back inside the housing. Double-sided wafer locks have wafers that extend out the top *and* bottom of the housing and are much more difficult to pick. Keys for double-sided wafer locks have notches in both edges of the bit. The Complexity of a single-sided wafer lock is +3 to +6; double sided is -2 to +2.

Cylinder Tubular Lock (TL7): Instead of a row of pins, tubular locks have pins or bearings located around the circumference of the cylinder making them harder to pick. Complexity ranges from +0 to -8.

Lockpicking

Involves the manipulation of a lock's components so as to open it without the use of a key. Lockpicking is as much an art as it is a science. All the study in the world can't help you if you don't have the "knack." The skill basically involves exploiting the weaknesses and defects in the lock mechanism. Constant practice is required to enable the lockpicker to acquire a feel for different locks and determine the best technique and tools to defeat them when they are encountered in the field. Virtually any lock can be picked provided the character has enough time and the right tools. The term "lockpicking" mainly

Cavity Padlock (TL6)

Handy for escape artists, the cavity padlock was devised by Harry Houdini. Apparently it was one of his best kept secrets. It consisted of a fairly large padlock that could be secretly opened without the need for a key. Part of the padlock contained a hollow cavity in which Houdini could conceal keys and lockpicks to use on other locks and handcuffs.

Are Lockpicks Legal?

It depends on the local laws but in many cases it is legal to carry items that might be considered burglary tools --

refers only to tumbler locks. The principle involves using two thin springy pieces of metal (lockpicks) inserted into the keyhole. One pick applies a small turning force (the torsion wrench) while the other "feels" the various tumblers. When a tumbler is lifted to the right height, a tiny "give" can be felt in the torsion wrench. As long as pressure is maintained on the torsion wrench, that tumbler should remain in the right position and the lockpicker can move onto the next tumbler. Often one of the tumblers will slip back down and the process needs to be started over again. Lockpicks differ depending on the type of lock and two or three different ones (one of these being the torsion wrench) are usually required to open most locks. A complete set of picks might include dozens of tools and are very expensive (see *Tools*, below). Early lockpicks were generally larger and heavier than modern sets. The best locks require weeks of study and the manufacture of custom tools. In these cases it is often easier to try and gain access to the original key so that a duplicate can be made (see *Keys*, above).

lockpicks, keys, screwdrivers, crowbars, etc. -- but it is illegal to use them to commit a crime. In some cases the items could be considered illegal if intent was demonstrated -- i.e. that the perpetrator had *intended* to use the tools to commit a crime. In other cases the object may be on a list of Restricted items (LC2) requiring some sort of license to purchase or use it.

If the lock can't be picked, it is usually possible to drill through it to disable the tumblers. This method can be noisy and the owner will know that someone has tampered with his lock (because it will have a big drill-hole through the keyhole). A neater approach is to use a small hole saw (attached to a drill) to cut the pins at the shear line while leaving the rest of the lock intact. If the intruder is careful (so as not to leave marks on the lock's surface) and cleans up his mess, the owner may never know that his lock has been tampered with since his key will work as normal. What he won't realize is that anything capable of fitting into the keyhole (such as a screwdriver) will now work too.

Safe Cracking

Safes and vaults are made from heavy steel plate (large ones consist of two plates of steel with concrete filling the gap in between), making them difficult to move or to break through. Many banks considered their safes so impregnable that they were on display to the public to demonstrate that their client's cash was secure. Most safe doors have bolts that protrude from all directions so it will remain securely closed even if the hinges are removed. Many safes employ both combination and key locks for double security. There is no keyhole on a combination lock so lockpicks are useless. However, in **GURPS**, a character uses the Lockpicking skill to compromise all types of mechanical lock, including combination dials. Most of the techniques described below do not require a skill roll to open but a skill roll might be needed to determine the best means of cracking a particular safe.

Manufacturer Default: Often the combination can be guessed because the owner never changes the manufacturer-set combination. If the safe cracker has a list of the manufacturer's combinations, he can try them one at a time until the lock opens. This is always a good thing to try first before attempting any of the following methods.

Eavesdropping: This is the default method of safecracking in **GURPS**. It involves listening to the faint "clicks" and feeling the tiny "bumps" made by the levers as they touch a contact point on a disc. It basically involves finding the contact points, determining the number of discs, and graphing the results to create a "map" of the mechanism. Once this is done the location of the notches and the combination of the lock can be determined. According to p. 45 of **Covert Ops**, any attempt to open a mechanical safe without some sort of stethoscope is at -5. This is modified by Acute Hearing. Safecracking uses touch as well as hearing so Acute Touch can also add to the skill roll. A regular

UL Standards for Safes

A rating system used to measure the resistance of a safe to physical penetration by skilled individuals.

- **Theft resistant:** The safe has a combination lock but can easily be penetrated with a drill or prybar.
- **Residential Security Container or TL5:** Able to resist a determined attack with a range of tools for at least 5 minutes (net working time).
- **TL-15:** Able to resist a determined attack with high speed drills, saws and other sophisticated penetrating equipment for at least 15 minutes.
- **TL-30:** Can resist the

stethoscope gives a base of -2 to the skill roll. An electronic stethoscope gives a base modifier of +0. Some professionals use what they call a "magnetic amplifier." It looks like a stethoscope but employs a magnet and only amplifies metallic sounds. It gives a bonus of +1. Using the eavesdropping method, a Lockpicking skill roll may be made once per ten minutes. One method of countering this is by using a microswitch that activates an alarm if the dial is moved. Another is to use very precise mechanisms (Very Fine quality -- see textbox, right) that are extremely difficult to crack by eavesdropping (-7 to -9).

Incremental Dialing: This is the simplest, though most time consuming, method of safe cracking and involves trying out all possible combinations, one at a time. Most combination dials are not very precise and any number within 1 or 2 on either side of the correct one will still work. This "dialing tolerance" drastically reduces the number of possible combinations on a three number lock from one million down to a few thousand. Because of this, a cheap safe can be opened in a few hours. A skill roll isn't necessary to open a safe using this method. A cheap quality lock can be opened in 2d hours. A good quality lock can be opened in 8d hours. Fine and Very Fine combination locks will take weeks or months to open using this method. To speed up this process, an *automated dialer* may be purchased (see *Tools*, below).

Drilling: The most common method of safe cracking. The safecracker must know the best drilling spot so as not to damage the locking mechanism and to give him good access. Once the hole is drilled, the safe cracker has several options -- he can insert some explosives (see below) through the drill-hole; he can insert a screwdriver and attempt to manipulate the locking mechanism; or he can insert an endoscope to watch the tumblers while the dial is turned (+5 to Lockpicking attempts). A Lockpicking skill roll is needed to determine where the best drilling spot is located. A failed roll results in hole being in the wrong spot and a new hole will need to be drilled elsewhere. A critical failure results in damaging the locking mechanism, preventing the door from opening. Some Fine and Very fine quality safes employ anti-drilling plates over vulnerable spots on the door. These are made of ceramic or tungsten carbide. Some consist of a series of steel washers that bind with the drill bit and spin with it -- making it impossible to drill. Many manufactures sell templates (for hundreds of dollars) to authorized locksmiths showing the best drilling location for various models.

Cutting: Oxyacetylene cutters can be used to cut through the steel plate of a safe but many large safes incorporate concrete between two steel plates, which is unable to be cut by oxyacetylene. To get through both steel and concrete a "thermic lance" must be used. This consists of a long tube connected to an oxygen supply and filled with steel rods. Once preheated, the steel at the end of the tube can be ignited (just like an oxyacetylene cutter) and will gradually burn away, producing temperatures high enough to penetrate concrete. Other useful tools include plasma cutters and abrasion saws. No Lockpicking skill roll is required but an appropriate skill roll to use the cutting equipment is, such as Smith at TL7 or TL8 (p.B221). These tools may also be used to "drill" a hole through particularly thick safe doors (see *Drilling*, above).

Explosives: If the door has a keyhole then a small amount of explosives can be inserted through it to blow off the front plate of the door, leaving the locking mechanism exposed (called "peeling"). If there is no keyhole, a hole must be drilled (see above) since the explosive must be on the *inside* of the front plate

above attack for at least 30 minutes.

- **TL-30 x 6:** As above except that all six sides of the safe have been tested.
- **TRTL-30:** The highest rating. This safe can resist attacks using the latest equipment including thermic lances, impact devices, and high speed drills and saws for at least 30 mins.

Combination Lock Quality

Combination locks can be divided according to quality. *Cheap* combination locks only consist of three numbers and have a poor dialing tolerance. They are commonly found on small safes intended for small business or domestic use, or on combination padlocks. Safes fitted with cheap combination locks are fairly simple to open using any of the techniques described (see *Safe Cracking*, left) and their complexity ranges from +3 to +6. *Good* quality combination locks are fitted to high end domestic and business safes. These usually have four number combinations and better dialing tolerances. Lock complexity ranges from +2 to -2. *Fine* quality combination locks are fitted to the vaults of most banks and other financial institutions. They have five or more number combinations with good dialing tolerances. Lock complexity ranges from -3 to -6. *Very Fine* combination locks are fitted only to the most secure and expensive vaults. They have up to eight number combinations and have very precise mechanisms. Lock Complexity ranges from -7 to -9.

to successfully peel it off. An Explosives (Demolition) skill roll (p.B194) would be needed to successfully peel a safe door using explosives. Any explosive powerful enough to blow through the safe from the outside is also likely to destroy its contents without a precise explosive charge -- an Explosives skill roll at -4 would be required. For more information on explosives see the **Basic Set**, pages 414-15. Anti-explosive devices lock down the safe door if an explosive charge is detonated, making it impossible to open -- even with the correct combination and/or key until the device has been disabled. This device may also counter drilling and cutting attempts.

Social Engineering: Often it is simplest to manipulate someone who already knows the combination to help you open it. This might mean anything from discovering where the person keeps the combination written down, to bribery or intimidation. The best way to counter this is with time locks. Even if the correct combination is known, the safe cannot be opened outside the appointed times.

Tools

Lockpicking is a technical skill and is therefore virtually impossible without tools. The **Basic Set** (page 344) suggests a penalty of -10 for any attempts without tools. Likewise, it suggests a penalty of -5 for attempts with *improvised tools*. Improvised tools can be made from household items: an allen wrench, small screwdrivers, bicycle spokes, piano wire, paperclips, bobbypins, large staples (bent straight and held sideways). If the character has time to modify these items into tools that are more suitable (filing, grinding, cutting, etc) then this penalty can be reduced to -3. Many of the following tools are restricted in some countries and a license is required for purchase.

Cheap Lockpicks (TL1): Consists of four or five steel picks (modern ones usually come in a foldable handle similar to a Swiss Army knife) and a torsion wrench. They give a modifier of -2; cost \$20; weight negligible.

Good Lockpicks (TL3): Consists of at least at least a dozen pick blade tools and a torsion wrench made of good quality spring steel to resist bending. They come in a soft case for easy carrying and provide a bonus of +0; cost \$50; weight negligible. These are the lockpicks listed in Basic Set (p.B289).

Fine Lockpicks (TL4): Consists of a complete set of several dozen tools, enabling a locksmith to comfortably work on the vast majority of locks. They are made of the finest quality spring steel and give a bonus of +2. Cost \$200; weight 0.5 lb.

Auto "Jigglers" (TL7): A set of lockpicks specifically designed for automobiles. The user selects an appropriate pick, inserts it into the lock, and "jiggles." This involves wiggling the pick in the lock while putting torsional pressure on it. The user doesn't really need to know how to pick locks to use jigglers, but for roleplaying purposes the same skill is used (Lockpicking). Auto jigglers are handier than lock picks because a separate torsion tool is not required, so only one hand is needed to open the lock. These tools provide a bonus of +4 to Lockpicking rolls but only on vehicle locks (cars, trucks, etc.) Cost \$25; weight negligible.

Lockpick Gun (TL7): Also called a "snap gun," it was first developed in the 1930s for FBI officers who were unskilled at lockpicking. It is a trigger-powered hand tool that performs a "raking" operation on the tumblers, hopefully causing all of them to be raised at the same time and allowing the lock to be opened. Alternatively, it can employ a needle-shaped bit that is "snapped" up and down. If the tip is slipped

Skeleton Keys

This term originally refers to a simple key designed to fit multiple types of old-fashioned warded locks. Harry Houdini had several handcuff skeleton keys, enabling him to open any pair of English darby or plug-8 handcuffs. Today they are often called "master keys." Skeleton keys have to be tailored for a specific type and size of lock. It is a myth that a single key can be devised to fit all locks.

Some lock manufacturers sell skeleton keys to authorized persons for a particular line of locks but this is usually kept secret. Examples: Hotels sometimes have a master key enabling all doors in the hotel to be unlocked. Automobile manufacturers sometimes sell skeleton keys to mechanics to aid servicing.

Most general-purpose skeleton keys can only be used on badly designed or very simple locks (Complexity +4 or more). Roll 1d. On a 1-4 the key fits. Cost \$20; weight negligible.

under the tumblers then these are also snapped up and down. Sometimes the tumblers strike each other and separate on the "shear line" of the lock enabling it to be opened. This tool does not provide a skill modifier but replaces the user's Lockpicking skill with the Lockpicking skill of the gun. Typical guns have a Lockpicking skill of 8; cost \$60; weight 0.5 lb. High quality ones grant Lockpicking-10; cost \$120; weight 0.5 lb. Battery powered lockpick guns (TL8) perform the same action as the manual trigger tool, but at a much faster speed and are generally easier to use. They grant Lockpicking-11. Cost \$200, weight 1 lb. The bits for these tools wear out fairly quickly. A replacement pack costs \$10. Note that using such a device leaves very specific forensic evidence. These guns work well on some locks and not at all on others. Only one skill roll is permitted per lock. If this roll fails, then the lock cannot be opened with a lockpick gun . . . time to try manual lockpicks.

Electropick (TL8): An electric motor vibrates a specially designed pick at a high frequencies. The pick is inserted into the keyhole and the vibration is transmitted to the pin tumblers. If the angle of the pick and the frequency is just right, the pins level out at the shear line of the lock, allowing it to open -- just as if the key had been inserted. The frequency can be adjusted to allow for different models of lock. This tool causes no damage to the lock mechanism, but can be very noisy. As with pick guns, electropicks replace the lockpicking skill of the user with the lockpicking skill of the item. Electropicks grant Lockpicking-12. Cost \$1,000; weight 1 lb.

Stethoscope (TL5): The device used by doctors to listen to patient's chests can also have other applications. If this device is used for safe cracking (see *Eavesdropping*, above), it provides a Lockpicking skill modifier of -2 (as opposed to -5 with no hearing assistance). Cost \$20; weight 1 lb.

Electronic Stethoscope (TL8): Consists of a sensitive contact microphone attached to an amplifier and headphones. This device is the default tool needed for safe cracking, providing a modifier of +0. Cost \$280; weight 0.4 lbs (see p.CO45).

Magnetic Amplifier (TL8): Similar to a stethoscope except that it utilizes a magnet and only amplifies metallic sounds, making it ideal for safe cracking. Magnetic amplifiers provide a +1 modifier for safe cracking. Cost \$500; weight 1 lb.

Endoscope (TL8): Developed for the medical industry, this device is also called a "borescope" or a "fiberscope." It consists of optical fibers mounted within a steel-mesh tube with a tiny lens at one end and an eyepiece at the other. Looking through the eyepiece, the user can see anything that the end of the endoscope is pointed at. Controls enable the tube to be flexed and bent precisely. Short-ranged endoscopes have a short focal-length lens and a bright light source. They are used by safe crackers to watch the locking mechanism while they rotate the combination dial, adding +5 to Lockpicking skill rolls. Cost \$1,500; weight 2 lbs (see p.CO45).

Automatic Dialer (TL8): Used to open combination dial locks. It is a mechanical device with an integrated servo-motor that performs incremental dialing at high speed -- checking all possible combinations. Simply place it over the dial (magnets hold it in place), switch it on, and wait. Cheap locks can be opened in 2d minutes; Good quality locks in 2d hours; Fine quality locks in 2d days; Very Fine locks in 2d weeks. Cost \$1000; weight 2 lbs.

Links

- Chubb Locks, *History of Locks* -- <http://www.chubblocks.co.uk/historyoflocks.html>
- MIT Guide to Lockpicking. -- <http://www.capricorn.org/~akira/home/lockpick/>
- The History and Science of Lock Pick Guns. -- <http://www.i-hacked.com/content/view/138/48/>
- How Safecracking Works. -- <http://www.howstuffworks.com/safecracking1.htm>
- Safe Cracking for the Computer Scientist. -- <http://www.crypto.com/papers/safelocks.pdf>

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Uxuloth, City of the Dead

by Matt Riggsby

In a distant corner of the world, crouching atop a hill and shrouded by darkness, is Uxuloth, the city of the dead. It is a society of undead and lurkers in tombs, of once-human and semi-human monsters who have fled the world of the living to find some kind of peace. Its ruler purports to desire only solitude, but are *you* going to trust the word of a centuries-old animated skeleton with an army of vampires and zombies at his command?

Geography and Land Use

Uxuloth occupies a steep promontory where a mountain range begins to trail off into foothills, about 20 miles east of an ocean inlet. The land to the north of the mountains is dry but arable plains, while to the south lies a rocky desert. The land itself is rocky, banded with shale and granite, and the soil is thin. There has been a little farming and herding on the few small plateaus and shallower hillsides of the surrounding area, but for the most part the land is unpromising for agriculture. Birds and a few goats live off a scattering of tenacious, scrubby vegetation. Such food as is necessary is imported. The nearest human habitation is at least four days travel away over land, and the nearest town of any size is more than a week.

The city itself occupies the west-facing slopes of a high hill. The eastern side is a sheer cliff, unsuitable for building, so the city is shaped a bit like a cone sliced in half vertically. The shore of a nearby sea is just barely visible in the distance.

One of the most striking features of the region is the Everstorm. Despite the name, it's not actually a storm (although rumor has it that the Bone King can use it as a source of lightning to strike enemies who come under it). Rather, it's a permanent formation of thick, dark clouds about two miles in diameter which prevent the light of day from touching the city. Other weather systems passing through the area may cause rain, but the Everstorm itself drops no water on the city.

History

The site of Uxuloth was originally occupied by a small garrison set by a great empire, little more than a frontier observation post. The empire fell, as empires do, leaving ruins behind. Some centuries later, the crumbling watchtower was reoccupied by a lich, a powerful wizard who had reanimated himself after death. He took the isolated spot as an ideal place to carry on his magical research, taking with him a few non-living servants (some undead, some animated by magic but never truly alive).

A few decades thereafter, the lich reached an agreement with a trio of vampires fleeing vampire hunters half a world away. The vampires would act as more powerful, intelligent agents for the lich than his current servants, in return for the right to shelter at his compound. The arrangement worked well. Over the next few centuries, the settlement at Uxuloth slowly grew as more liches and vampires trickled in, seeking the company of their own kind or fleeing the living who hunted them, and their followings of ghouls and other servants grew. They began to depend on a growing body of zombies to perform physical labor. The city's founder, who continued to hold the reins of power, became known as the Bone King.

Uxuloth reached its height about 300 years ago when a militant monastic sect launched a crusade against the undead. The warrior monks were able to overcome many powerful but independent undead by sheer weight of numbers. Survivors flocked to Uxuloth as a natural center of resistance. In time, it also became a natural target. With a final great battle under the Everstorm, the dead armies of Uxuloth overcame the monastic legions. The surrounding area, never thickly populated or frequently visited, became completely deserted for fear of the monstrous city. It has not been seriously threatened since, and its population remains near the peak it achieved at that time.

However, the strain of maintaining its position is starting to show. Instead of a fractious lower class, the city's day-to-day economy and industry rest on a large population of zombies. As the city grew, the supply of dead bodies easily matched pace with any new population. But even zombies wear out over time, and it is becoming harder and harder to replace them as they do.

There is a general feeling that decisive action needs to be taken to sustain the city's faltering way of "life." But that direction is not forthcoming. In recent decades, the Bone King has become nearly quiescent, spending days, even weeks at a time in silent contemplation of whatever mysterious issues concern him. His administrators continue to run the city based on old policies, but the lesser aristocrats of the city agitate for a larger role in running things.

Society

Uxuloth's society is rigidly divided into three classes. Each has more privileges and legal protection than the one underneath. At the top of the ladder are the High Undead, or lichs. In addition to the Bone King himself, the High Undead occupy the city's priesthoods and a number of high offices. Any lich who pledges loyalty to the Bone King may become a resident of the city, but at the moment there are about 100 in residence.

Below the High Undead are the Eaters of the Living, or vampires. Where the High Undead are the city's rulers, the Eaters of the Living are the officers and chief agents in the field, directors of industry, and, as much as the city has one, polite society. They are divided into Houses, where relationships are traced by who made one a vampire and marriage-like unions made with other vampires ("divorce" is fairly frequent) rather than any biological or marital relationships from one's living days. Potential immigrants at this level of society or below must be sponsored by the head of a vampiric house or a lich. There are perhaps 1,500 in the city.

Beneath them are the Eaters of the Dead, ghouls and other eaters of carrion. Some are not, technically, undead, but all have a mystical dependence on the flesh of sentient beings. They constitute the rank-and-file artisans, assistants, sergeants, and overseers. There are about 5,000 of them in the city, although their numbers vary from time to time.

Below these residents are three groups with no real rights. The most numerous are the animate dead, mindless zombies who perform most of the city's physical labor. They are treated as a valuable resource and their use is regulated by the city, but they have no more rights or political power (and no more volition) than the city's streets and walls. The number varies considerably, but is currently around 55,000, a number seen as too low for the long duration.

The second are the Chattel: live captives and slaves brought to Uxuloth to feed the vampires and, if there's enough left of them, to be fed to the ghouls or reanimated for labor. Most vampiric houses have a moderately-sized stable which experiences high turnover despite the increasingly expensive use of healing magic to keep them healthy. Depending on the preferences of the household, they may be treated as anything from livestock to "guests" (although polite treatment is invariably the result of the head of household's desire to appear magnanimous rather than any actual regard), but it's quite clear to everyone involved how they'll end up. At the moment, there are probably between 3,000 and 4,000 in the city, which is likewise rather too small a number for comfort.

The final group is the Quick, free living people of various races, including human hangers-on to the recently undead, worshipful death-cultists, a handful of extremely brave merchants, and a few travelers who have come to the city in hopes of gaining powerful secrets. They are not, strictly speaking, residents. No living person is allowed to stay in the city between sunrise and sunset (being property, the Chattel don't count), so they live in a small suburb just outside the walls. They have no rights as a group, but individuals may be granted sponsorship by a vampire or lich, making it moderately illegal to kill or rob them. There are about 5,000 of the Quick living outside the city more-or-less unmolested.

The city's physical construction mirrors the class structure. The Bone King's palace is at the top of the hill, the residences and primary haunts of the High Undead below that, with mansions of the Eaters of the Living, districts of the Eaters of the Dead, and industrial areas for zombies farther down and living humans living outside the city walls.

Government and Politics

The Bone King survives and is still the city's absolute ruler. However, he shows increasing reluctance to rule. Or, indeed, to move. He spends most of his time seated in his throne or in his tower, observing the world through a scrying stone, and has been known to remain completely motionless for days at a time. Serving him is a body of censors, a powerful combination of secret police and bureaucracy making sure the Bone King's laws are upheld. Censors are themselves High Undead, although they employ a network of spies of all classes.

The Bone King is advised by the Senate, a group of 17 vampires serving overlapping terms of 17 years each, with one being replaced annually. A prime minister is elected from among the senators each year. As each seat becomes vacant, three candidates are nominated by the Eaters of the Living and one of them is chosen by lot by the priests of the dead gods. If a senator is killed or destroyed, his seat stays vacant until the next election (or unless the Bone King intervenes, which he never does). Although the Senate has no legislative power, it must hear proclamations before they officially become law and senators act as both generals in times of war and magistrates, trying criminals apprehended by the censors.

The politics of Uxuloth are complex for a place where so few people can be directly involved in the political process. Senatorial and election politics, for example, are often subtle contests between rival vampiric houses, contests which have become sharper and more important of late. The Senate, censors, and priests of the dead gods have been quietly jockeying for authority for centuries, but with the Bone King growing increasingly moribund, the Senate has been exerting more and more influence over the day to day governing of the city. The High Undead worry about the growing vampiric ascendancy, but they are handicapped by their relatively small numbers and the Bone King's inaction.

There's also growing agitation for increased power for the Eaters of the Dead. Although they are rarely as individually powerful (physically, magically, or -- sad to say -- intellectually) as the Eaters of the Living and the High Undead, they are far more numerous; with the city's increased trade over the decades, they are becoming, as a group, significantly wealthier and more connected to the outside world.

In addition to conflicts over internal issues, the city has seen recurring conflicts of the question of isolationism and undead supremacy, essentially maneuvering around the question of what Uxuloth's relationship with the outside world should be. Despite the clear need to maintain the zombie work force, the residents of Uxuloth have long-standing and justified concerns about contact with the living world. The isolationists favor minimal contact with outsiders, no more than is necessary to fill present needs, while the engagement faction champions more expansive, long-term ties. The factions are themselves divided. Among the isolationists are the fatalists, who suggest that the city be allowed to die a natural death, just as any living thing must pass away. Since much of the city's sentient population has consciously chosen to circumvent death, this is very much a minority opinion, although some very powerful High Undead are sympathetic to the position. The engagement faction is divided between imperialists, who believe that Uxuloth must control the living people it deals with in order to prevent further wars against the undead, and the integrationists, who favor building alliances and regular trade as a means of not arousing the hostility of the living.

At the moment, isolationists hold the upper hand. It's a position held by most of the High Undead and a significant number of Eaters of the Living, particularly first-generation vampires who fled oppression in the living world and have no desire to return. However, potential threats to their food supply are pushing more of them towards at least cautious imperialism. They have the support of a great many of the Eaters of the Dead, who see expansion into the outside world as an opportunity for enriching themselves.

The current primer minister is Acadro of the house of Varania, a second-generation descendent of one of the vampires who served on the first Senate. He has just started his fourth consecutive term as a Senator, which suggests divine favor to some, undue influence to others. Acadro's tendency towards expansionism is fairly open, but he's a master of compromise, bringing together most of the expansionist factions while not tipping his hand towards either imperialism or engagement and not giving isolationists undue cause for alarm. He has spoken in favor of establishing an area of direct control beyond Uxuloth's current sphere of influence, but publicly favors alliances and trade over warfare as a way to bring in cattle. As it happens, a majority of the Senate has isolationist leanings, centered around one Melixa,

also of the house of Varania. Acadro and Melixa were turned by the same vampire some centuries apart and have been fighting for control over their house for centuries. Melixa is know to associate with Chun Kyai, the chief censor.

Religion

The official religion of Uxuloth is appropriate macbre: the worship of dead gods. The Bone King and many of the High Undead have made a practice of finding forgotten religions and gods who are no longer worshiped or believed dead by their one-time worshipers.

Priests are appointed from among the High Undead. On a day-to-day basis, they simply perform rites and maintain temples. However, they serve as a divinatory arm of the government in the infrequent event the Senate or the Bone King decides to see what the future holds. They also serve as a rarely-used court of appeal with the power to overturn the finding of the Senatorial magistrates. Their trials are painful ordeals, leaving their subject scarred at best and often permanently damaged, so few take advantage of the option, and those who do are usually completely convinced of their own innocence.

In addition, since Uxuloth is ultimately a multi-ethnic city, other gods are privately worshiped. The High Undead tend to leave their old gods behind, but some of the vampiric houses maintain small shrines to the gods of their native lands and the Eaters of the Dead often hold on to a variety of foreign traditions.

Armed Forces and Law Enforcement

Because of its remote location and fearsome reputation, Uxuloth rarely needs to exert military might. On those few occasions where it becomes necessary, a force of zombies is armed as heavy infantry (there have been sporadic and largely unsuccessful experiments with cavalry on zombie horses). The detachment includes a few Eaters of the Dead to issue tactical orders, usually one for every twenty or thirty zombies, and an Eater of the Living as commanding officer for every two or three hundred zombies. The officers are appointed as necessary by the Senate (or, for small detachments, a single senator). An army of over a thousand will have a senator as commander-in-chief and perhaps one or two High Undead for magical support both on the battlefield and to animate new zombies from casualties on the other side. One of them will be a priest with authority to override the commander's decisions, although that authority is rarely invoked.

Law enforcement is the province of the censors. The precise number of censors is unknown; seven perform their duties openly, but it is believed that several more work in secret. Every censor, a High Undead hand-picked by the Bone King, is theoretically an independent agent answering only to the Bone King, but the most senior censor serves as an informal leader when unified action is needed. Other undead at all levels of society, however, work as deputized agents. Public manifestations of the censors are rare, typically limited to guards at the city gates and occasional patrols of armed zombies led by ghoulish sergeants. With such a small sentient population, public disorder is rare and usually dealt with privately by members of each class.

Economy

Even the dead want things. The Eaters of the Living and Dead both need a constant supply of new bodies for sustenance. The city as a whole needs them to replace the animate dead that wear out. The city's many magicians need magical raw materials, and there continues to be a market among many of the aristocratic undead for luxuries (largely books, textiles, and various ornaments; wines and exotic foods aren't in high demand, for obvious reasons). In order to get what it needs, the Bone King allows limited trade with the outside world. It conducts this trade slowly, carefully, and through as many intermediaries as possible.

At the forefront of Uxuloth's trade relations are favored members of the Quick, known as the blood merchants. They put a less geographically intimidating face on Uxuloth's steady imports of slaves. To avoid drawing attention to the trades, slaves are usually bought in small lots in relatively distant cities (recently purchased slaves who are familiar

with Uxuloth are much more likely to attempt escape or suicide) and marched out closer to their destination. Once the slaves are well away from their point of purchase, the live merchant makes rendezvous with the zombies who will escort the slaves to Uxuloth. As with military detachments, they're accompanied by intelligent undead to direct the journey. Naturally, these caravans move by night, often digging burrows for shelter during the day (the zombies need no rest, but the slaves and caravan officers do). Journeys are typically long, with routes chosen to minimize human contact, typically through wilderness and wasteland. The necessary precautions are, unfortunately, expensive in terms of time, supplies, and wear-and-tear on slaves. Sea voyages are avoided, both for lack of cover and an aversion on the part of many Eaters of the Living against traveling over water.

Zombie caravans will also carry less ominous cargo. There is a lighter but steady demand for various kinds of livestock (some of the undead may subsist on a mixture of animal and human substance), luxury goods and magical materials: rare plants and minerals, books, spices, and dyes. Glassware is another common import; lack of breath makes glassblowing a difficult art for the undead to practice.

In exchange, Uxuloth's major exports include magical items and copied manuscripts. Zombies make poor copyists, but lich and vampire scribes need little or no rest and have lifetimes to perfect their craft. These high-value items are typically sold discretely to a wealthy, specialized market. It's also a source of exotic jewelry, either made in Uxuloth or brought there by undead refugees from across the world.

Points of Interest

Uxuloth is a very unfriendly city for the living visitor. There are few public houses within the walls and none that would encourage normal human patrons, and many of the city's residents would as soon eat the visitor as look at him. Most of the important locations in the city are landmarks rather than tourist attractions:

The Bone King's Palace: The site of the ancient empire's watchtower is now occupied by the palace of the Bone King. It is a windowless, cross-shaped building, decorated with elaborate carvings both inside and out. At the center of the cross is a tall spire with the king's private observatory and work rooms.

Ruined Temples: Immediately below the palace is a ring of temples in a remarkable variety of styles. However, once a temple is built, it is defaced in some way. Sacred statues have their heads broken off, baptismal fonts are drained, prayer wheels are frozen on their axles, and so on, all to indicate the defunct status of the gods they were made in honor of.

Charnel Warehouses: The lower levels of the city contain a number of industrial mausoleums, which are the Charnel Warehouses. These serve as holding pens for zombies not currently in use, facilities for performing animations, and warehouses for corpses awaiting animation. Bodies may receive special treatment for specific purposes. They may be stripped of flesh to provide animate skeletons, alchemically treated to make them more durable or resistant to flame, or simply preserved for future animation. Stocks of dead bodies are, of course currently low, so the warehouses are largely empty, consisting of large, echoing rooms filled with the smell of death but little else.

Quick Alleys: Living visitors will probably want to stay close to the areas occupied by other living people as much as possible. This suburb, known collectively as the Quick Alleys, consists of a number of buildings and small plazas just outside the city walls. It's a very quiet place, and people tend to keep to themselves. Despite the relatively privileged position of the residents, there's still an air of fear about the place, and they try very hard not to do anything that could be regarded as disturbing the residents of the city proper. They are generally not harmed, although there have been unfortunate incidents in the past. There are a few shops for food and other necessities, but no inns. However, visitors can occupy any of a number of abandoned buildings, and they may be able to find people willing to take them in as guests.

The undead will receive a much better welcome than the living, of course, and will see the same sights in a different light. The Eaters of the Dead live in small homes in the middle level of the city and there are usually empty ones for new residents to claim. They also have raucous pubs (it may seem sometimes that the ghouls are the only ones in Uxuloth who have a good time), although what they serve is best left to the imagination. Eaters of the Living will be

received more-or-less permanently as guests in existing vampiric households so long as they behave themselves. Vampires entertain in their own homes, with a few parties and salons every day, and do not maintain or frequent public houses. The same is largely true for the High Undead, but they rarely meet socially in groups of more than three or four.

Uxuloth in the Campaign

Uxuloth is a natural candidate to be the capital of an evil empire. It demands a steady supply of dead bodies and many of its residents require the blood of the living. Even if Uxuloth isn't an expansionist power, few living people are likely to regard it as anything other than a focus of evil. Even living visitors who come with an invitation will feel at least a little uncomfortable there.

However, the city doesn't need to be so malevolent. It could simply be a quiet, remote, even otherworldly place, despite the very creepy setting. In an even more isolationist Uxuloth, the dead could simply be waiting for the end of the world, however many thousands of years it'll be. Stringing up well-behaved visitors by their heels and slowly draining them of their blood would simply be too much trouble.

And there's always the option of having Uxuloth at the center of a campaign, with the PCs as ghoulish foremen, vampiric aristocrats, and ruling-class liches. Adventures within the city are likely to involve social and political intrigue, since the vast majority of sentient beings in the city are aristocrats or at least, for lack of a better term, middle class. PCs could fight threats from within, carry out risky missions among the living, and might have the mystical resources to face dangers that threaten the whole world.

Here are some other campaign and adventure ideas around Uxuloth which assume that the PCs are living outsiders:

War: Although it has no friends, because of its isolation Uxuloth has no active enemies either. But new ones are just an anti-undead crusade away, or the result of a decision within Uxuloth that it's time to impose its own order on the surrounding world. Whatever the reason, the PCs will be facing an army with soldiers who never tire and officers who feed off of the living.

Trade: It's dangerous and uncomfortable, but trading with Uxuloth is also potentially very, very lucrative. A brave (or perhaps foolhardy) merchant hires the heroes to escort a shipment of slaves to the city. Can they be sure their employer has permission to come to Uxuloth? And can the PCs trade with its residents without being drawn into their tangled concerns?

Rescue: An important nobleman or a friend of the PCs has been captured during a war, and the PCs must find him and return him home. Following the slave trade, they discover that he is being taken to Uxuloth. How are they going to get in? And once they do, how are they going to get out? A twist on this idea is that once they infiltrate Uxuloth and find him, they discover that he has actually been brought there willingly to rejoin an old lover or relative, now a vampire, who now resides there.

These adventure seeds assume that the PCs are residents of Uxuloth:

Renegade Vampire Army: Tired of waiting for the quiescent Bone King to change his policies, an aggressive cabal of vampires organizes a zombie army and launches an attack on a nearby town to force Uxuloth into facing the outside world. PCs might try to stop it before the renegades bring a new war down on themselves, or might join it to get in on the ground floor of a new empire.

Braaaaains: Uxuloth survives on its masses of zombie laborers, so a catastrophic problem in the Charnel Warehouses threatens the city's existence. Not only are the zombies no longer taking orders, they are attacking and devouring any sentient creature they can find. Can the city's residents reverse the disaster and return the zombies to their obedient state? Must they destroy the city's work force? Will they even be able to survive? And was this truly an accident, or did someone make it happen?

The Lost Heir: A (human) generation ago, a new vampire appeared in Uxuloth, a deceased princeling of an empire not too far away. The empire is now in the grips of a dynastic war, and the vampire prince is now the closest "surviving" relative of the old rulers. One of the factions has decided to use him as a figurehead to support their cause. They're going to try to take him from Uxuloth (whether he wants to go or not); other factions will try to make sure that never happens. The PCs will most likely have to find and fend off spies, but the more politically ambitious might try to help the schemes and extend Uxuloth's influence to a useful new ally.

Appendix Z

Golem Construction System for *GURPS*

by Steven E. Ehrbar

The standard *GURPS Fourth Edition* golem rules, on page 59 of *Magic*, leave most options for variant golems entirely up to the GM. While this works fine for many GMs, some could use the support of a little more structure. The Golem Construction Kit provides a system for quickly creating balanced variant golems.

First, select the basic golem material on the Standard Golems table. This table shows the basic game statistics for the golem, its mass, and the energy costs for both the standard humanoid and the quadruped form. Quadruped forms have the disadvantages Horizontal and No Fine Manipulators, and ST and DX above 10 were purchased with the No Fine Manipulators limitation for energy costs. If you want a standard man-sized golem, you can stop here.

If you want a larger or smaller golem than the standard, decide on the size modifier, from -2 to +2, then look up your selected material on either the Smaller or Larger table. The mass, ST, and energy cost on this table is scaled for your new size, and replaces those numbers for that type from the Standard Golems table. Again, you have a selection of a humanoid or quadruped golem.

Finally, you can add some additional form options to golems created under these rules. They go beyond the normal ST, HP, and DR allowed in the standard Golem spell rules. They not only increase the energy cost of the golem normally, but increase the minimum energy cost from 130 as well. The choices are Claws, Constriction Attack, Extra Arm, Extra Legs, Flexibility, Slippery, Spines, Striker, Teeth, and/or Vibration Sense; add twice the character point cost of the advantage (after enhancements and limitations) to the energy cost given on the tables.

Standard Golems

Material	Type	Lbs.	ST	DX	IQ	HT	DR	Skill Points	Energy	Q Energy
Adamant	Metal	500	35	12	9	15	12	14	814	518
Aluminum	Metal	540	20	14	8	13	6	10	510	268
Bakelite	Plastic	300	12	12	9	13	2	10	270	142
Brick	Earth	400	15	10	8	15	2	10	250	130
Bronze	Metal	1800	25	13	9	16	6	10	670	422
Chalk	Earth	500	14	10	8	14	0	10	190	130
Clay	Earth	200	15	11	8	14	0	10	250	130
Concrete	Earth	500	17	11	8	14	1	10	300	148
Copper	Metal	1800	19	12	9	14	5	10	460	276
Cotton	Plant	250	12	11	8	13	0	10	170	130
Diamond	Earth	700	20	16	9	15	2	14	638	382
Flesh	Body	200	18	12	8	14	0	10	350	174
FPS	Plastic	10	10	13	8	10	0	10	150	130
Glass	Earth	500	15	15	9	14	2	10	470	270
Gold	Metal	4000	20	13	9	14	4	10	510	302
Granite	Earth	500	20	11	8	15	4	10	410	234
Iron	Metal	1600	30	12	9	16	6	14	738	466
Ivory	Body	400	14	12	8	13	1	10	260	130
Lead	Metal	2300	20	11	8	14	4	10	390	214
Marble	Earth	500	20	11	8	16	6	10	450	274
MMC	Metal	140	50	12	9	15	20	14	1258	796
Orichalcum	Earth	1700	50	12	9	15	12	14	1178	746

Paper	Plant	250	13	11	8	14	0	10	210	130
Porcelain	Earth	500	9	13	9	10	0	10	170	130
PVC	Plastic	250	10	13	8	11	1	10	180	130
Rubber	Plant	200	15	15	8	16	1	10	460	260
Salt	Earth	420	20	15	9	14	2	10	570	330
Silicone	Plastic	230	14	15	9	15	1	10	460	268
Silver	Metal	2000	20	14	9	14	5	14	568	344
Steel	Metal	1700	45	12	9	15	8	14	1038	646
Titanium	Metal	900	40	12	9	16	12	14	998	646
Uranium	Metal	3800	35	11	8	16	12	10	800	504
Wax	Plant	200	10	11	8	14	0	10	150	130
Wood	Plant	200	20	12	8	14	5	10	440	248
Wool	Body	300	16	11	8	15	0	10	290	146

Smaller Golems

	SM -2				SM -1			
	Lbs.	ST	Energy	Q. Energy	Lbs.	ST	Energy	Q. Energy
Adamant	60	18	474	314	210	26	634	410
Aluminum	70	10	310	166	230	15	410	226
Bakelite	40	6	130	130	130	9	210	130
Brick	50	8	130	130	170	11	170	130
Bronze	230	13	430	278	760	19	550	350
Chalk	60	7	130	130	210	11	130	130
Clay	25	8	130	130	85	11	170	130
Concrete	60	9	140	130	210	13	220	130
Copper	230	10	280	168	760	14	360	216
Cotton	30	6	130	130	105	9	130	130
Diamond	90	10	438	262	300	15	538	322
Flesh	25	9	170	130	85	14	270	130
FPS	1	5	130	130	4	8	130	130
Glass	60	8	330	170	210	11	390	222
Gold	500	10	310	182	1700	15	410	242
Granite	60	10	210	130	210	15	310	174
Iron	200	15	438	286	680	23	598	382
Ivory	50	7	130	130	170	11	200	130
Lead	290	10	190	130	970	15	290	154
Marble	60	10	250	154	210	15	350	214
MMC	18	25	758	496	60	38	1018	652
Orichalcum	210	25	678	446	720	38	938	602
Paper	30	7	130	130	105	10	150	130
Porcelain	60	5	130	130	210	7	130	130
PVC	30	5	130	130	105	8	140	130
Rubber	25	8	320	160	85	11	380	212
Salt	50	10	370	210	180	15	470	270
Silicone	30	7	320	160	100	11	400	232
Silver	250	10	368	224	840	15	468	284
Steel	210	23	598	382	720	34	818	514
Titanium	110	20	498	406	380	30	798	526
Uranium	475	18	460	300	1600	26	620	396
Wax	25	5	130	130	85	8	130	130

Wood	25	10	240	130	85	15	340	188
Wool	40	8	130	130	130	12	210	130

Larger Golems

	SM +1				SM +2			
	Lbs.	ST	Energy	Q. Energy	Lbs.	ST	Energy	Q. Energy
Adamant	1700	53	1088	648	4000	70	1394	698
Aluminum	1800	30	670	396	4300	40	790	406
Bakelite	1000	18	374	198	2400	24	454	230
Brick	1350	23	384	200	3200	30	470	230
Bronze	6100	38	874	522	14400	50	1010	562
Chalk	1700	21	308	140	4000	28	398	174
Clay	675	23	384	184	1600	30	470	214
Concrete	1700	26	448	224	4000	34	544	256
Copper	6100	29	622	358	14400	38	728	392
Cotton	840	18	274	130	2000	24	354	146
Diamond	2400	30	798	462	5600	40	918	502
Flesh	675	27	496	248	1600	36	606	286
FPS	35	15	240	130	80	20	310	130
Glass	1700	23	604	340	4000	30	690	370
Gold	13500	30	670	382	32000	40	790	422
Granite	1700	30	570	314	4000	40	690	354
Iron	5400	45	968	576	12800	60	1138	626
Ivory	1350	21	378	178	3200	28	468	212
Lead	7800	30	550	294	18400	40	670	254
Marble	1700	30	710	354	4000	40	830	314
MMC	470	75	1628	966	1120	100	1898	1036
Orichalcum	5700	75	1548	916	13600	100	1818	986
Paper	840	20	330	154	2000	26	406	182
Porcelain	1700	14	262	130	4000	18	318	130
PVC	840	15	270	130	2000	20	340	132
Rubber	675	23	594	330	1600	30	680	360
Salt	1400	30	730	410	3400	40	850	450
Silicone	760	21	578	330	1840	28	668	364
Silver	6750	30	728	424	16000	40	848	464
Steel	5700	68	1382	806	13600	90	1618	866
Titanium	3000	60	1298	786	7200	80	1518	846
Uranium	13000	53	1074	634	30400	70	1260	684
Wax	675	15	240	130	1600	20	310	134
Wood	675	30	600	328	1600	40	720	368
Wool	1000	24	422	214	2400	32	522	250

Q Energy is the energy cost to make a quadruped form of the golem.

FPS is foamed polystyrene (as seen in Dow Corning's Styrofoam™ brand foam insulation).

MMC is metal matrix composite.

PVC is polyvinyl chloride.

Pyramid Pick

Werewolf: The Forsaken (for the World of Darkness Storytelling System)

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

Written by Carl Bowen, Rick Jones, James Kiley, Matthew McFarland, & Adam Tinworth with John Chambers, Ken Cliffe, Forrest B. Marchinton, Deena McKinney, Wayne Peacock, Sean Riley, Matthew J. Rourke, & Ethan Skemp

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Cover by Matthew Millberger, Aileen E. Miles, & Richard Thomas

322-page two-tone hardcover; \$34.99

The arrival of **Werewolf: The Forsaken** and its unfortunate abbreviation continues White Wolf's effort of to reset and re-imagine the World of Darkness. The expectations for this replacement for [Werewolf: the Apocalypse](#) have been high, more so than for **Vampire: The Requiem**, the game that replaced **Vampire: the Masquerade**. In a way, its predecessor never quite had the impact of **Vampire: the Masquerade**, being less convoluted and more sharply drawn in black and white, resulting in more of a blank canvas for the designers and authors to work with. Of course, the new game has to overcome the perennial "superhero by night" aspect of the old, which **Werewolf: the Apocalypse** arguably exemplified from the start, with the player characters being the good guys. With all that to overcome, what everyone wants to know is, what has White Wolf done with the beast?

For starters, the new hardback is gorgeous. The cover continues the tactile matte-gloss contrast motif of **the World of Darkness Storytelling System Rulebook**, this time in rich bronze. Inside everything is crisply laid out, bronze used as a second tone and for all of the artwork, much of which is very good. Others are superb, especially those of the bad guys. Further, the writing is better than that of **Vampire: The Requiem**, being more direct and clear, paralleling perhaps the nature of the werewolf itself.

Of course, the most obvious question is, why **Werewolf: The Forsaken**? The title harks back to an age when Father Wolf hunted across Pangaea, protecting the Physical World from the Spirit World. Mother Luna gave birth to his children, the First Pack or Uratha. For a time they hunted with Father Wolf, but eventually he grew old and weak, and denizens of the Spirit World took advantage. Pangaea suffered, and the Uratha were forced to slay Father Wolf. The death of Father Wolf and the destruction of Pangaea is the crime for which the Uratha and their descendants are Forsaken. This is as much for the guilt felt by the Tribes of the Wolf as for the hatred held by the spirits they must police. Mother Luna herself cursed the Uratha with the bane of silver, but she still gifts her children with the auspices.

Still, the Uratha are loyal to Father Wolf's task, policing the Physical World from spirit incursions, and the Spirit World from damage inflicted by mankind. Some spirits trickle across to run riot in human hosts; the worst are the "Azlu," or spider hosts whose spinning thickens the Gauntlet between the worlds, and the "Beshilu," the rat hosts

whose gnawing weakens it. In addition, there are other werewolves, the Tribes of the Pure, who did not commit patricide, and hate the Moon Tribes for it to this day.

In simple terms, werewolves are not the rage-fuelled eco-warriors bent on a holy crusade to save Gaia from the ravages of the Wyrms. Still prone to the rage and a primal urge, werewolves direct it at more local threats. Like ***Vampire: The Requiem*** before it, the scope and focus of ***Werewolf: the Forsaken*** has been vastly scaled back, no longer world spanning, with werewolves rarely straying beyond a pack's territory. Such a territory can be rural, urban, or a mixture of both, and throughout the book, this is the default setting. It enables a pack to freely hunt and have to deal with man's effect upon the Spirit World.

The werewolf nature has also changed, his rage needing to be kept in check lest he slaughters indiscriminately, including his family. This potentially murderous bent is reflected in the inspiration, which includes *An American Werewolf in London* and *Ginger Snaps*. A werewolf is born of a human and a werewolf mating, never of two werewolves, and not always even then; a descendant, invariably suffering from temper problems, might undergo the First Change and learn his true nature.

As with ***Vampire: The Requiem***, characters are mortals first, created using ***the World of Darkness Storytelling System Rulebook***, and then adding the details from this book. The time of his First Change also determines a werewolf's auspice, of which there are five: Full, Gibbous, Half, Crescent, and New Moon, or Rahu (warrior), Cahalith (visionary), Elodoth (judge), Ithaeur (wise man), and Irraka (stalker). A werewolf will be adopted by a tribe, essentially his family with which he shares particular philosophies, and again there are five: Blood Talons (warriors), Bone Shadows (shaman), Hunters in Darkness (stalkers and scouts), Iron Masters (innovators who like living in cities), and Storm Lords (werewolf aristocracy). Ghost Wolves are those without a tribe. Both auspice and tribe grant a werewolf extra skill dots, Renown dots, and Gifts. Later on in a campaign a character can petition to apply to a Lodge, a faction within a tribe, of which nearly 20 are described to some degree.

Primal Urge and Harmony, a werewolf's main Advantages, or secondary traits are similar to ***Vampire: The Requiem's*** Blood Potency and Humanity, though they work slightly differently. Primal Urge is an indication of a werewolf's difference from humanity, his connection to the Spirit World. It also caps the maximums for his attributes, skills, and Essence, the spiritual energy used to activate Gifts, regenerate lethal wounds, automatically shape shift, and so on. Primal urge also caps how long a werewolf can shape shift for. Eventually a werewolf with a high Primal Urge is forced to maintain a connection with the Spirit World or suffer constant Essence Bleed until he becomes comatose. Where Morality and Humanity concerns just a single code of behavior, Harmony continues the duality of the game. A werewolf must find a balance between the wolf and the human, between the spirit and the beast. Even not shapeshifting for days can force a Harmony check, with failure leading to the acquisition of a derangement. The other Advantage is Renown, not just a measure a werewolf's reputation among his own kind, but also with the spirits.

Spirits are important to a werewolf, not because they will be his friends, but because when a spirit's respect is earned, then it will bestow Gifts upon a werewolf. Far more Gifts are described here than the Disciplines of ***Vampire: The Requiem***, most having a primal feel in keeping with the game. They enable a werewolf to peer through the Gauntlet into the Spirit World, command the elements, read others, and so on. They work by making an attribute plus skill roll to which is added dice for the listed Renown, enforcing the concept that a werewolf must make a name for himself in both worlds. Werewolves can also learn Rites, which are more spiritual in nature, as the invoker makes a direct call to the ancient spirits. Like Gifts they purchased or won on a case-by-case basis.

The default set-up for ***Werewolf: The Forsaken*** has the player characters forming a pack -- preferably a pack of five werewolves, one of each auspice so that it is a blessed pack -- and taking control of a territory. This centers upon a Totem, a spirit whose patronage they have won and who will grant bonuses in the form of dots to attributes, skills, and Gifts. Rules for the creation of a pack's totem are included, and is done following character generation, but the tracking down and the gaining of its patronage should certainly be played out. Once set up, the pack will regularly patrol on both sides of the Gauntlet, dealing with difficult spirits.

For the Storyteller, the advice on running ***Werewolf: the Forsaken*** favors this type of game, but is nevertheless excellent. It is backed up by a more extensive list of antagonists than was found in ***Vampire: The Requiem***, but then

this game is far more extrovert, the enemy more likely to come from without than the vampire's within. If the Storyteller has both new games, there is advice in both on the mechanics involved should a vampire encounter a werewolf, or vice versa. It is clear, simple enough, and more common sense; should the Storyteller want a method of rating werewolf against a vampire, then the respective values for Blood Potency and Primal Urge should do.

The first of the two appendices details the Spirit World, covering how it can be entered through the Gauntlet. There is an emphasis upon the resonance that the Physical World has upon it, particularly mankind's. These include the emotional effect of places that can blight its spiritual reflection, while other areas might be spiritual droughts, or places of healing and growth. The second appendix provides a sample setting in The Rockies. Again it emphasizes the rural and the urban, its theme one of rebuilding and resetting the area's balance after a long war against an Idigam, a vile spirit from deep within the Spirit World. It is up to the Storyteller to develop his campaign within this setting.

Where the previous new World of Darkness books were merely good, here the authors do a fantastic job of bringing a setting to life. The emphasis upon the duality of both the character and the setting is effectively brought to the fore, as is the fact that the werewolf is still a monster, though one almost kept in check. There is almost everything here that a Storyteller needs to get started and yet there is also room for White Wolf to develop and expand the game. Anyone who denounced the cancellation of the old World of Darkness and the release of the new should take back their words; ***Werewolf: The Forsaken*** is proof that White Wolf has not been wasting their time.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Fearsome Floors

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Created by Friedemann Friese

Art by Maura Kalusky

Full-color boxed set containing mounted board, 17 floor tiles, eight monster movement tiles, starting player tile, seven teams on 25 wooden disks with stickers, & rulebook; \$37.95

It's a cold and wet night in France, and though you've gained the artifacts you need to finish your quest, that task is actually incidental to the action. You thought Prince Fieso would help you in your work, but he betrays you, sticks you in his dungeon, and if these tourists want to see daylight again they have to cross *Fearsome Floors*.

The object of the game is to be the first to get enough character tokens from one end of the dungeon to the other without being attacked and eaten.

The board comprises several rows of squares, with pillars at the intersections. This arrangement keeps Furunkulus, who haunts the lower levels, from seeing diagonally. He can see and move side to side and straight ahead (he's too thick-headed to look behind him). He stumbles on until he sees a victim, at which point he moves toward them until he's had his fill of tourists or runs out of movement. Walking into walls doesn't stop this juggernaut: Just as weird as the rest of the castle, when Furunkulus thunders into walls he reappears elsewhere.

Two to seven players start at one corner of the dungeon with their teams of characters, and they have to get to the other side. Your movement score is how many dungeon squares you can step. Each character has two movement numbers, one on either side of its disk, that add up to seven. After a turn of movement the disks are flipped, so if you move the dog one space this turn, he'll have a whopping six spaces next go-round (assuming he's not turned into a frankfurter).

Players complete their movement before the monster goes, so you want to place yourself where you think the monster won't be able to see you or get to you. Barring that, you want to draw the monster toward you in the hope that it makes the creature spot an opponent's token. If Furunkulus starts after one tourist but then sees another who's closer, he'll turn. (The walls "wrap around" -- that is, if the creature walks off one side of the playing area he'll pop back in the other side, though on a different row). What follows is a trying attempt to anticipate all these factors so you can escape unscathed.

The basic game is fairly straightforward rules-wise, though you can add complications in the form of floor tiles. The starting game has blood tiles and stones. Step on the former and you slide across several squares of floor; the latter hide you from the monster's sweeping gaze, but enemies can push them out of the way and leave you exposed. The advanced game has tiles that force Furunkulus to turn precipitously; crystals he can see but not move through; and teleporters that force him to take detours across the room.

The pieces are all quite sturdy, and the artwork on them is from an equally steady hand. It's got a careful, blocky, comical look about it that accurately reflects the old EC Publications horror comics from which it derives its style. The monster itself has to be constructed -- it's a standing figure, and it's easy to turn and shift it about the board -- and you can mix and match these pieces. Have a slime-monster, the traditional Furunkulus, or put them in a blender and cap it with a one-eyed top-hatted freak. It's an added expense, but one it's hard not to appreciate.

You have to apply the stickers to the wooden playing pieces yourself, but none of them are hidden in any way so don't worry if you haven't the surest grip. The teams are all amusing horror archetypes -- the FBI, the "friends" (including their pup), slick-haired rockers out of the 50s . . . there's even an extra pair of stickers for the designer and the artist (but you'll have to provide your own wooden disks if you want to use them). The rules are a bit spotty where the translation isn't perfect, but all becomes clear after a quick reread.

There's an awful lot to account for in a turn and it may seem almost impossible to come up with a winning approach, but it's not nearly as frustrating as some strategy games. They don't go too far overboard, and oversights on your part are almost certainly balanced by the mistakes your enemies make trying to command the intricacies of monster movement. Adding the crystals and such gives you more to think about, but in some ways the simpler game makes it awfully easy for the monster to grab you at some point. More obstacles means a meandering monster path, and perhaps wasted movement.

Rio Grande Games asks a bit for this property, but ***Fearsome Floors*** is good exercise, and really appealing to the math wizards for its calculations and to the strategist for its permutations. And players who just want to have fun . . . plenty of that, too.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Missing Missives

This week has marked the first full week of living together as a married man. Combining two households into one -- especially when both halves of the couple are over 30 -- is a real challenge, akin to seeing what would happen if you combined some atoms together by spinning them in a huge circle really, really fast. Considering how I lived in a cluttered 900-square-foot apartment back in ol' Tallahassee, moving in with a spouse into an 800-square-foot apartment has most frequently led to images involving phone booths and college students.

Among other challenges this week, I've been struggling mightily to ensure our combined households play well together, especially in our finances, personal desires, and so on. (Frankly, it's only the blinding aspects of newlywed marital bliss that keep this from feeling rather creepy: "Honey, you've put me on the checking account, right? Greaaat . . . and can you tell me where the life insurance policy is? Super. Oh, and we should make out our wills. No rush . . . anytime within the next 12 hours is fine.") I feel as if we're living out approximately 12% of the episode beginnings of *Love, American Style* and 25% of the episode beginnings of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.

One of the items on the massive laundry list of things to do was ensuring that my wife has the usernames and passwords for my e-mail, my personal online accounts, financial website info, and so on. Should something happen to me (such as accidentally having a tire iron split open my skull before the first commercial break), I don't want her to be in a situation where she can't access important information. When my dad died, I know that my stepmom's household was in disarray for quite some time as she struggled to put together the disparate pieces of personal information necessary to access stuff.

One of the side effects of this, however, is knowing that at some point she could access my e-mail, my online accounts, and so on, finding a record from me from beyond the grave.

Now, why she might want to comb through 100,000 e-mails accumulated over a decade (a majority of which begin "Thank you for your interest in contributing to *Pyramid*" . . .) is unknown. However, assuming for the moment that I was interesting, that would be an ideal time for her to stumble across a letter having some special significance or information after the fact.

And, if I existed in a gaming universe, I *would* be interesting, and that would be the beginning of an amazing adventure or story . . . one which would change the face of the world . . . forever.

Or not.

Anyway, in gaming adventures and fiction, one of the classic ideas is the "lost" letter -- a piece of information that somehow surfaces separated from the time of writing, usually at a time or place unknown to the writer.

It's an idea that transcends genre and time period; whether you're talking unearthed cave painting, message in a bottle, hidden will, mysterious video tape, or datachip in carbonite. (Really, a gold record retrieved from a satellite is about the same as a message in a bottle.) And the lost-and-found message taps into a number of satisfying ideas.

First, I suspect many of us like the idea of learning secrets, reading other people's mail, and so on, and the lost message is a way of doing so without guilt. In fact, there's an implicit encouragement in the act of accessing such a missive. ("If he didn't want us to read it, why did he mark it 'Urgent!' and tuck it into a random library book?")

Second, consider that a treasure map has an implicit and presupposed ending (meaning, the players have an idea how it'll turn it); so does a king's proclamation, a will, and so on. But a lost or hidden message can lead literally anywhere. Imagine any of the following as the first words of a found message:

- "If you are reading this, then a murderer has no doubt gone free . . ."
- "I only hope that whoever reads this will be able to succeed where I have failed at containing this evil."
- "[I have deposited in the county of Bedford, about four miles from Buford's, in an excavation or vault, six feet](#)

[below the surface of the ground, the following articles . . .](#)"

- "If you are not Phil McGillicutty, it is imperative you get this note to him, as only he will know what to do with it . . ."
- "I am 37 as I write this, in the summer of 1983. If it is possible I have not succumbed to the effects of old age, I implore you to rescue me . . ."
- "If you don't start closing the kitchen cabinets so I don't conk my head, you'll be sleeping on the couch for a month."

Okay . . . that last one might be more likely to appear on a Post-It Note appended to my computer than in any mysterious note, but the others are still valid and interesting.

Third, unlike many quest-starters, the lost message already has a character tied with it -- albeit one who may be dead or unavailable -- giving the quest itself more personality than most standard adventures. (As a tangential example, almost any of the items listed under [famous ciphertexts](#) in Wikipedia have a fascinating sense of character about them.)

For many, children are considered our legacy to the future. But, in a broader sense, the things we do, make, and say will outlive many of us, perhaps even extending beyond our children. As such, lost-and-found messages are a great gaming device for a number of reasons . . . and they're usually easier than kids to stuff in bottles and throw into the sea.

--*Steven Marsh*

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Gorilla Uprising

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

At the edge of an alien interstellar empire (or on an alternate earth), there exists an insignificant mining colony, where mankind has been forced into slavery. The reptilian alien masters have forged a mostly benign society based on their culture, trying to take good care of the serfs. While it is true that the Cik'mar (pronounced si'kem-ar) officially consider the humans second-class citizens, there are some Cik'mar who have grown up on this planet, and consider the "gorillas" to have potential. The alien religion is creationist, believing all life was created and has a purpose. Part of their cultural upbringing is that until a being is deemed ready of making its own choices, it must be protected. This currently includes humanity, but that may change. There are humans who cannot abide others having control of their fate and mean to shake the foundations of this peaceful civilization, to rebuild it with the humans as equals (or higher).

Briefing

Contact: Alien Race - Cik'mar

Description: Upright Biped Reptilian

Planetary data and message recorder contents follow.

Planet Cylene

Atmosphere: Dry, warm

Gravity: 1.1 G

Water Coverage: 50%, mostly found in polar oceans

Diameter: 6,000 miles

Length of "day": 29 standard hours

Length of Year: 408 local days, 280 standard days

Most facilities are in arid "subtropical" zones - there is little exploitation of other latitudes.

[Rustling, static]

I am recording this in the hope that this recorder will eventually reach headquarters.

This place is extraordinary! Humans and aliens are working in harmony. Access to the area around the war factories is free, even if we cannot enter the building proper. Locals are also very friendly to outsiders, even if we are not trusted immediately.

Planet/Cities

The city-mines and city-factories are in many ways organized like medieval cities. There is an inner citadel where the aliens live, with a separately enclosed airport adjacent. Next are factories and residences for Employees. Beyond a wall from these are suburbs for non-Employees. Beyond the outer city live "barbarians." Exceptionally active barbarians can merit a final outer wall to protect the suburbs. The inner and outer cities are each ruled as separate entities by separate councils of elders. To prevent disease, the suburbs have cool running water and sewer services. (The environment provides heat.)

Schools are open to everyone, even what they call "barbarians." I have learned much about their language, politics and geography in a short time. The other

students have taught me some slang. Apparently they want to raise the basic education level of the "barbarians." I also discovered that they wisely reserve any education that is "modern" or higher for "Employees."

Band of Gorillas

Human culture generally follows a blend of traditions from the various equatorial tribes from approximately 1,000 BC. There is little tension in the cities, as the presence of Cik'mar and the "Employee" cultures serve to keep perspective. It is known that humans have only been on this planet for a few thousand years, and the Cik'mar only a little longer. Where mankind was before the Cik'mar arrived may not be known to any being on the planet.

Education and morals are important, even for suburbanites. Employee children are taught to read, write, and speak both their native tongue and that of the Cik'mar. For safety and to instill good sense, they are also taught the fundamentals of mathematics, physics, chemistry, and even economics. Policy ensures that suburbanite children receive the same fundamentals as Employee children, although the curriculum does not have as high a standard. Popular hobbies include team sports, gardening, astrology, and games such as kite-fighting and a game not unlike chess. Lower-class suburbanites enjoy knife-fighting and martial arts tournaments (see Weapons, below).

Some cities, especially those with hazardous or deep mines operate a monorail, which allows commuters to travel from a city of up to hundreds of miles away (each mine links to one city). Most factories operate around the clock, in three overlapping ten-hour shifts per 29 hour "day." Shifts have rotating breaks, during which the maintenance crews perform routine check-ups and replace parts. If someone does not have a job, the Cik'mar have a system in place to help him or her find one. If they cooperate, they will be given aptitude tests and education. Failing that, they may be placed to work in a mine. Although some Cik'mar are known to rise to any level in human organizations, some humans have risen to middle management of a Cik'mar organization this is seen as a great achievement. Almost every human Employee knows someone who has been elevated over a Cik'mar.

Human Employees work in mines, refineries, and factories. Criminals work in the most dangerous areas as part of rehabilitation programs. The TL10 Factories employ most of the Cik'mar on the planet. They oversee the final steps personally.

Beyond the Cik'mar-run cities, there are a variety of TL4- civilizations of a variety of governments and attitudes. There are also free cities and wandering tribes that have protection and information pacts with the Cik'mar officials. Roving bandits normally avoid these groups as attacking them can bring swift retribution from flying SWAT teams. Actual TL3 "barbarians" rarely interfere with the lives of even suburbanite city dwellers, preferring to trade for high-tech goods to raid neutral cities and trade caravans. Rebel lab-forts often must deal with roving bands that want their easier to maintain technology.

Slang

Vidwall

Vidwall is a mature TL8 Liquid Crystal Skin technology produced at TL10 efficiency (see p. VE92). With the lack of television and radio in the outer sections of the city, this allows these denizens to experience much of the outside world in community events in the large bazaars and parks surrounding the outer wall. Radio receivers are distributed in the public areas, with volume level appropriate to the ambient noise and time of day.

The area surrounding the outer walls of the Employee area is composed of commercial districts for at least two reasons. The first reason is that this ring is the first thing that the better-off Employees see when they come to buy goods. The second is that the top half of the wall is covered with Vidwall (see sidebar), which provides coverage of government improvement activities, weather reports, foreign gladiatorial matches, as well as hunts (See "Justice in a Banana Republic," below). Employees with high morale are more productive in the long run. It also advertises job openings in local facilities-the health benefits alone draw many applicants, even in mines! Mining communities are inherently mobile, and those portions that can't be moved are biodegradable plastic or wood. When the mine is depleted, the disposable buildings are plowed in to cover up the mine, and the land is returned to its original state.

In addition to religious terms (including "The Great Egg," "Shards," "Seven Sages"), the following are used (although children using such language should be reprimanded by any adult in earshot):

Buzzed	Stunned, knocked out.
Gorilla	Cik'mar derogatory for a human.
Seeing Blue	Mad, angry.
Sicker	Human derogatory for a Cik'mar.
Sunfire	A curse, from a myth of a solar fire that burns things to dust.
Sunk	Destroyed, ruined.
Treed	Gone into hiding.

The school had a tour of a manufacturing plant recently. I have hidden filings from the plant in this data recorder's pocket so the alloy can be analyzed. Apparently we will be given aptitude tests later.

Technology

The Cik'mar are TL10, but with contragravity, reactionless thrusters, TL6 robotics, and TL8 computers, sensors, and stealth. They do not, themselves, employ watercraft.

Humans are TL4 without gunpowder, but Employees have free access to TL8 medical treatments. There are a large number of civilian TL(4+n) technologies carefully administered by watchful eyes, adapting TL4 materials to meet higher TL ideas. Some ideas include mail, plumbing, electricity, and animal-powered mass transit. GMs should feel free to add any other retrotech ideas -- the culture has had over 1,000 years to witness a mature TL9 culture evolve into TL10. Rental of TL6 vehicles for farming, fishing, and leisure is permitted. This includes cars, boats, trucks, and railroad, but not flight. The rail lines bring food to the cities and take refined goods back to the farms. Mechanics are a close-knit guild although many retire to be recluses . . .

"Barbarians" in the wilds are a mostly TL3 culture, but there are rumors of enclaves with technology up to TL6 and the TL7 medicine secretly taught in cities. They may even be close to discovering radio. Their greatest fear is discovery by the alien sensors, which *might* be able to detect them with PESAs and MADs if the Cik'mar had a reason to search the area.

In general, the factories produce empty space torpedoes, deck plates, beams, anti-static high-grip carpet, adhesives, magnetic coils, tube cars, and furniture. They do not make any sort of electronics, explosives, or beam focusing equipment. For local use, factories produce TL6 vehicles (for rent or lease only), Very Fine blades as well as TL10 Super Fine blades for Cik'mar troops. There are a few factories in Factun that produce goods rarely seen on Cylene. Adjacent to the military compound, they are completely operated by a combination of civilian and military Cik'mar. Using imported electronics and engine cores, they produce small star and space ships in addition to providing this world's grav vehicles and g-carriers.

I have just witnessed a Cik'mar SWAT team in action. They employ sonic stun grenades liberally, and while no one got hurt, my ears are still ringing. With their power armor, they are strong! One picked up an ox!

Gorilla Warfare

In this mainly TL4 world, civilians are typically armed with a variety of knives, as well as a few varieties of swords. In cooler climates, heavy cloaks serve as shields. Unarmed combat is typically some form of Boxing. Suburban guards wear light armor and carry bucklers and spears. They also know disarm techniques, even unarmed (Boxing). Human Employee law enforcement has access to transparent shields, Very Fine swordbreakers, and TL8 ear protection and tasers.

Most police forces are comprised of humans, with the exception of the Cik'mar SWAT teams that handle very violent humans, as well as investigate crimes against their people. The SWAT teams use sonic stun weapons (including pistols

and grenades), and carry locked, holstered needlers as a last resort to which they are immune. When expecting resilient trouble, they wear light battlesuits, always traveling in groups of two or three. They also employ their own specialties of Boxing, Karate, and Judo (see the style ["Emulating the Dragon"](#)). Alien weapons and tools are uncomfortable for humans to use (-2 to skill, -1 if a one-handed tool is braced with the other hand as per p. B548.) Rebel equipment consists of mostly TL6 gear, including submarines and life support equipment. Exceptions include TL7 ear protection and a random assortment of stolen equipment from guards and Cik'mar.

I am now an Employee, living in a small apartment near the factory. While I was studying some of the few civilian electronics safety manuals in my free time, I discovered someone had slipped me a card, indicating where I could find out more about Resistance cells! Further contact will be at a blind drop location.

Military

The military garrisoned on the planet is small, with fewer than 1,000 full-time soldiers spread over the dozens of city-states. The planetary military squads are usually bored. There are almost no riots, and this planet has never been invaded. They are *not* police, and spend much of their time guarding boring facilities or training in simulations or mock battles. Above-average performers with the inclination can participate in the stalking and culling of selected Deathbeaks for food purposes. Those that perform well are allowed to participate in a Hunt (see "Justice in a Banana Republic," below).

When prepared for trouble, they are armed with light power armor (DR20, can operate underwater for a day -- see "Tactical Armor," page 284 of the *Basic Set*), and carry variable blasters as their typical weapon. Only rarely are they called in to quell rebellion. They are special ops, not SWAT teams, and thus not concerned about taking prisoners as results. If the suspects are to be arrested, send in the SWAT team. If they are to be silenced, send in the marines.

It was a set up! Following the directions, I entered a room to discover two unconscious Cik'mar guards, sporting gaping bullet wounds! More guards arrived at that moment, and I was arrested. Apparently my fingerprints were found on a slugthrower discarded outside. Fortunately, they did not search me thoroughly, and this datacorder is non-ferrous.

Justice in a Banana Republic

Justice is swift. Employees are encouraged to purchase "alert" jewelry to signal police that they need attention. This is the equivalent of a 911 call. All are designed to go off and self-destruct harmlessly if opened, or removed away from a specific transponder. There are essentially four castes on this planet: Aliens, Employees, suburbanites, and "barbarians." Each level of difference between criminal and victim makes the punishment more severe. For example, an Employee trying to steal a gun from a guard would receive a lesser sentence than a suburbanite trying the same tactic. Minor criminals are usually sentenced to community service. Medium sentences include demotion by a Caste and work in a random mine or gladiatorial combat. Those that volunteer to stay once their sentence is up get paid as Employees!

The most common "criminal" activity for a Rebel is to steal a higher-TL item. The most easily found higher-tech item is TL8 medical supplies, so they are up to TL7 medicine, helping those they can in secret. This service makes it hard for strangers to overcome the level of trust that getting medical care of three (or more) tech levels higher can bring. As forest bandits providing game to villages bought silence and help, how much more can medical aid? This even extends to "black" TL7 medical clinics in suburban areas.

Although incapable of digesting terran meat proteins, many military officers are rewarded with the chance to hunt a dangerous human criminal. Because of reputation, most humans fight to the death. Typically, the criminal is deposited on a random island, and the soldier two to four days later. A "lighter" death sentence may allow the criminal a weapon. Such slugthrowers and energy weapons will self-destruct within seven days if not placed in a proper recharger. All are likely to be of Cheap quality. In the case of SWAT team members, it is considered bad form to hunt the same criminal that you helped catch. Sometimes, groups of humans are set on an island, lightly armed, and given an objective. (e.g.

hold this position, plant a flag behind a line.) Those that participate and survive are healed and transferred to the mines. Very violent offenders may be required to fight a Battle Royal against each other. The last man standing in this free-for-all is then sent to a lone maximum security mine in the middle of a scorching desert.

Since I did not name my accomplices who raided the arms locker, who I didn't know anyways, I am to be sentenced to the arena for five years. I am told that had either of the guards died, it would have been much worse. I have since been contacted by another resistance cell, which has apologized for the other cell's actions.

Gladiatorial Arenas

It was discovered that there were always a certain number of humans who felt a need to perform violent acts. Gladiatorial combat was discovered as a way of directing this tendency such that it can have a positive effect on society for those who do not fit into the military. Those that obey the rules get TL8 medical care.

GM Options

- The fight is to the death. Professional soldiers are sent in with better and better tech until the criminal is dead. If the first soldier is unable to find and produce the criminal's head after a day, another soldier is landed each day thereafter.
- After eluding captive a certain number of days, the convict is to be taken alive, and given the option to join a special "human" squad, made of hardened, loyal, medically conditioned soldiers, who are used as a sort of "[Foreign Legion](#)."
- Or, there are gladiatorial matches in public arenas in the suburbs, with hardened gladiators. Those that fight according to the rules also get the option of buying one's freedom after a number of years. Those that do not "play nice" get reduced income, essentially becoming indentured workers in a "company town."

Sample community: Factun (a.k.a. Factory One)

Population: 100,000: 5,000 Cik'mar, 20,000 Employees, and the other 75,000 being humans working in support industries such as food, textiles, and basic utilities.

As the first colony, it has many "firsts" and "largests." In this city are found the oldest guild halls and temples, making it a religious and secular Mecca. The main military barracks on the planet are also situated here. This city has the main Deathbeak herds for the planet, and is one of the largest cultural centers of the planet (see "Ride 'Em *What?*" below). It was the first colony, and contains the largest airfield, as well as the only starport on the planet. This is apparent by the "ancient" TL9 weapon turrets surrounding the core of the starport that date to the founding of the colony.

As crazy as it sounds, I have befriended a professional guard at the arena. It turns out that she has as many questions about human "barbarians" as I do about her people. In addition to this, I have access to cultural information and constructive craft lessons as part of my "rehabilitation." Still, nothing about security or geography.

Gorilla Activity

Rumors

- There is a secret enclave hidden from alien eyes by a concentration of the unusual metal. Here, the iconic rebel leader is secretly teaching resistance members the secrets that will soon free mankind! It might be in the mountains, in an island, or under the ocean.
- To make things difficult for the peaceful recluses, the activist Dr. Fang is leading a group that is subtly sabotaging the refineries. The military estimates that production at some facilities has dropped by as much as 10%, but are excited and worried by the chance to see action. So far, the blame has been pointed at local

burrowing animals, but efforts to trap them have been unsuccessful so far.

- Rebels may also have experience forging IDs to make people pass cursory checks by security.
- Hunting lodges in areas just outside cities can sometimes operate as a rebel contact point, teaching individuals to use TL6 firearms and TL7 First Aid.
- Rebel fortress-labs are often in woodland areas so the comings and goings can be diffused.
- Underground labs are trying to secretly advance to higher technology.
- Along the coasts, they use TL6 Very Low Frequency transceivers to communicate stealthily.
- Much of the metallurgy would be based off of scrap metal salvaged from the refineries, or just made of scrap metal melted down and recast.

Going Bananas (Adventure Seeds)

Forward Plot

Recently, there have been an increase in maintenance required to the supply lines leading to mines, refineries, and external factories. The PCs are hired as investigators to discern which group is behind it and where they operate from. They will be given a digital camera with 10× zoom and light amplification features (30 day battery and self-destruct). A roll against Strategy(Land) will give a likely location, and a specific roll at -5 will estimate the headquarters (Critical Failures giving false leads).

Golden Banana

A Cik'mar armory transport went down in the hills nearby your location. There will be injured Cik'mar guards. Are they to be aided, ignored, or left to die?

- As Rebels, can the PCs get in and out with unlocked tools for your people?
- As guards, can the team get there and prevent looters from taking tools and valuables? Balancing the tasks of disabling vehicles and applying first aid to surviving guards is critical!

Next is a romp through the woods, with the guards hot on their tail using PESAs and MADs to try to track the vehicles through the dense underbrush.

Added Spice: The weapons were unwisely shipped loaded with power cells.

First Contact?

While most rebels would be grateful to encounter a group of high-tech aliens, some will resist someone else becoming the source of rescue.

The Cik'mar may welcome an ally earth, especially if they agree to trade technology. For advances in robotics, sensors and stealth, they would gladly give FTL travel as well as an insignificant mining world . . . If this is done, then the world will find itself in need of defense and control infrastructure, which could be outsourced back to . . . the Cik'mar, who already own equipment in place.

First Contact, Take . . . Two?

While observing the Cik'mar, they discover a cruel race that is capturing, torturing, and devouring humans and Cik'mar alike. Thwarting the newcomers (called "Devourers") and freeing Cik'mar prisoners would be a good start to diplomacy.

Poison Apple (Cik'mar coup)

Certain human rebels are sponsored by Cik'mar groups seeking a change in power . . . when the Devourers attack, they will try to seize power.

Complications:

- Will either side keep their part of the bargain? Will they be successful?
- When the dissident group attacks, rebels who help the winner will have a place in the future government!

Prison Break

Although the island Hunts typically kill the prisoner in combat, sometimes convicts have been found hiding in caves, even trapped or dead. This fate has been assigned to many prisoners not found after a month of trained commandos searching an island with TL10 tools. The truth is that some of those stories are actually due to covert pickups by Rebel submarines! The heroes must arrange for a covert pickup, involving contacting the prisoner with the location, ensuring there are no Cik'mar grav vehicles in sight of that location, and actually making contact.

Ride 'Em What?

There are generally two common kinds of herd animals, and they tend to get along. They are genetically disparate, with humans able to eat animals from earth, and the Cik'mar with their food sources, but not vice versa. Humans have cattle, but the Cik'mar have brought "Deathbeaks" (see p. RS112, and Diatryma on p. BE49). A cultural aspect of humans that amuses the Cik'mar is the taming and riding of the Deathbeaks (as there are no horses or llamas on this planet). There are rodeos, races, jumping and trick competitions of a variety of forms across the planet. The Cik'mar never developed riding animals.

Darkness

Rumor leaks out that cargo ships have stopped arriving to rotate Cik'mar crews, bring irreplaceable components, and take away refined ores. Warehouses are filling with exports, and emptying of stores. Who will make the first desperate move? Will the planet then have to resist an invasion of the Cik'mar's enemies? Can they stand together, or will the opportunity cause the group to break into factions?

There is a Cik'mar-lead group surveying the area near the enclave. How will the rebels react? Will they try to bribe human Employees on the team, steal equipment, alter reports/readings to dissuade further surveys, or silence them?

O Holy Night

On a holy day, mines, refineries, and factories will rest, most of the guard minimized. Are the Rebels the kind to take advantage of this, or are they pious enough to respect it? Alternately, perhaps placing bombs the preceding day to go off while the factories are empty.

Librarian

A Cik'mar historian is traveling the world, scanning in texts for his collection. The PCs are hired to steal or copy the data files. Alternatively, the historian might actually be an intelligence agent (maybe one who anticipated this, and has a trap waiting). Or as a final possibility, the librarian might also be a Secret Agent.

Guns of Factun

The rebels must steal TL9 "relics" from the starport. As most TL10 equipment gives a -20 penalty for TL6 scientists; TL9 is much easier to decode by comparison. The catch is that the gun and its sensor each mass around 200 lbs and occupy 4cf. The challenge stages include the starport defenses, the Employee city wall, and the suburbs. As a

complication, the would-be thieves discover that their briefing was incorrect -- the ultradense parts mass 2,000lbs each (but still occupy only 4cf)!

Will the Good Doctor Please Come With Us?

The group hears of a reclusive Cik'mar scientist who seems to like the planet. If the PCs are rebels, they receive word that a violent group will take advantage of his isolation to remove him. They have a limited time to find him (or her), sound his possibility of conversion, convert him, and fake his death. (Avalanche, volcano, underwater . . .)

Variants

Infinite Worlds

The first rumor for Infinity Patrol to investigate is that of secret human labs with samples of alien tech. It is likely easier to infiltrate TL6 labs that think themselves secret than to break into alien labs with TL10 security features, even though sensors are TL8. The next catch is convincing them to part with it. I'm sure they would both want to help the rebels *and* get *their* hands on the alien tech . . .

Paranoid Alien Masters

Each worker gets a tattoo on their wrist bone, invisible to human tech, but easily readable by specially-configured TL8 scanners.

What's Earth?

These humans are the descendants of a seeder ship that lost its way when its computer malfunctioned. The Cik'mar were desperate for laborers, and these seemed the most able.

Templates

Rebel

Rebel is a lens to add to a society group; it is considered the default, with "unskilled suburbanite" as the default "racial" template.

- Raise TL to 6 [varies]
- Secret [-10] or Social Stigma [-10]
- Ally Group [varies by cell]
- Claim to Hospitality [5]

Most rebel groups are organized by some sort of Rank, with each enclave having about 4 levels. Typical ranks are neophyte (1), member (2), trustee or elder (3), and leader or councilman (4). Even if they lack formal distinctions, there will be a pecking order of responsibility.

"Barbarians":

- Social Stigma (Barbarians) [-10]
- Primitive 3 (TL3) [-15]
- Suburbanites: Social Stigma (Second-class Citizen) [-5]
- Primitive 2 (TL4) [-10]
- Xenophilia (15) [-5]

Employees:

- Familiarity with TL6 [0]
- Xenophilia (12) [-10]

Skills: History (local human), History (Cik'mar), Literature (local human), Literature (Cik'mar), Language (Broken/Accented) (Cik'mar).

* Some have "High Tech 4 [20]" instead, and can learn Cik'mar IQ-based skills, and Mechanic (specialty)/TL.

Cik'mar [0]

- DR 3 [15]
- Claws (Sharp) [5]
- Enhanced Tracking (+1) [5]
- Protected Sense (Hearing) [5]
- Striker (Tail) [5]
- Temperature Tolerance 1 (Heat only) [1]
- Chummy [-5]
- Cold-blooded [-10]
- Sense of Duty(Community) [-10]
- Unusual Biochemistry [-5]
- Xenophilia (15) [-5]
- Racial Quirk: Aversion to Deep Water [-1]

Alien Morphology

Skin color of this reptilian race varies greatly, with no particular tie to Status. Individuals may be yellow, blue, green, brown, or red, and their offspring a completely different shade. Some even have a soft camouflage combination. An individual's underbelly scales are typically similar to their hue, but mixed with a green-brown (patterns that appear like a camouflage in their natural environment). Their hands are somewhat larger than human hands, although with the claws, they seem to be just as dexterous. Vision is shifted slightly into the infrared with preferred colors being greens and browns. Females tend to be taller, but possess the same attributes. Note that Cik'mar are immune to needlers due to their DR.

On Cylene, they also enjoy an additional level of Social Regard [5], as well as High Technology +4 [20]. While not impossible, it is unlikely for a Cik'mar to join the Rebellion. A GM should ask for an Unusual Background for a Cik'mar rebel PC.

Designers' Notes: *GURPS Banestorm*

Tales of Alternate Yrths

by Phil Masters & Jonathan Woodward

As most readers doubtless know, [GURPS Banestorm](#) updates the old *GURPS Fantasy* world of Yrth, moving the "present day" of the setting forward to 2005, and incorporating *GURPS Fourth Edition* rules material. However, it does a bit more than that; it also adds some new stuff, changes a few things that we decided could be improved, and fixes a few problems we found in the old material.

Most significantly, though, it's a worldbook. As such, one thing it necessarily *has* to do is nail things down fairly hard. We can't tell you *everything* about the continent of Ytarria in just one volume (let alone any other continents which may exist), and we leave a few mysteries and open questions for GMs to play with, but when we do talk about something, we have to be definite about it. We had a lot of options and possibilities in front of us when we started this project; part of our job was deciding what to do about them. Other *GURPS* books are toolkits, and very fine they are too; here, we're selling a *setting*, and our readers are entitled to expect firm statements of "fact."

Which is not to say that GMs *have* to use Ytarria and Yrth exactly as we've written them. RPGs are an interpretive, flexible medium, and if anyone wants to turn "our" Ytarria upside-down and inside-out, that's fine with us. In fact, given some of the discussions we had along the way, we can think of a few places to start.

Personality Issues

To begin, individual NPCs may be rather different people from what the book describes. (This is a very good way for GMs to outsmart players who read the book and abuse that knowledge, without completely changing the world.) Of course, where these individuals have political power, these changes ripple through to influence great events in the setting. Some examples:

Messing Up Bronwyn: In our final draft, Baroness Bronwyn of Durham is a heroine, from most people's viewpoints. Loyal, capable, and honorable, she's also a secret supporter of certain movements which players may favor, and she may become a key actor in the resolution of the Caithness Civil War, and in the future of Yrth.

However, she underwent a number of changes along the way. She's now a widow, but we'd originally kept her unmarried, until some of our playtesters pointed out just how implausible that was for a 34-year-old feudal noblewoman. We looked at a number of fixes for this problem, which could appear in variant Yrth games.

First, Bronwyn could still be married. The trouble is, this would make things emotionally complicated for King Conall, who's secretly in love with her. We even considered the idea of having Bronwyn's husband, Sir Wickham, be a hero of the war, with Conall sending him off on a series of increasingly dangerous missions, only to come back covered in glory each time. Sir Wickham probably doesn't understand the reasons for these missions, and Conall *maybe* doesn't even acknowledge it to himself. However, this made Conall into much more of a bastard than we wanted. So we killed the husband, with a simple disease -- ah, the joys of amoral godhood.

For another variant, he could have stopped an arrow in the course of the Civil War, generating even more angst. Conall would feel responsible for Bronwyn's tragedy, and would be worried that people might think he'd deliberately put the chap in harm's way. How much soap do you want in your opera?

Alternatively, Bronwyn could be refusing to marry anyone. We even drafted a rather different biographical note for her:

... her advisors and family are increasingly concerned by her refusal to seriously consider marriage. She says that, so long as the war continues, she cannot risk the distractions of courtship, let alone childbirth; they fear the consequences of her lack of a clear heir. Romantics among her people call her "the Virgin Knight" or "the Amazon Baroness," and say that she is married to her lands.

Those who know her best fear that the famous incident when she was kidnapped by orcs in her youth has left her traumatised and unwilling to let any other being have any sort of personal power over her. Some think that she would accept a suitor who proved himself strong enough to match her; others think that she would reject anyone who threatened her total self-reliance.

In other words, we could have made Bronwyn into Ytarria's Elizabeth I, or even its Red Sonja. We rejected that plan, as it left our prospective heroine a little too psychologically messed up, and made the Conall-Bronwyn romance plot *much* too difficult for all concerned. Other options were out; she couldn't be nursing a secret passion for Conall -- that would be too silly -- while having her fancy someone else unattainable would make the romantic entanglements hideously complicated. So, in the end, we created and killed the good Sir Wickham of Durham, and gave Bronwyn a son and heir.

Aspects of Conall: Talking of the King of Caithness -- even in our final version, he's someone who appears very differently depending what angle you choose to look at him. Disastrously weak king or noble ruler growing into his office, hard-working and dutiful or a boring control freak, romantic or just neurotic . . . You can find all of these opinions in Caithness. (One of our playtesters certainly disliked the poor guy.) However, any of these opinions could be completely justified. Conall could be a hopeless wimp, a macho warrior, or a tyrannical schemer. He could also be married -- his bachelor status is one of those points where we privileged plot over probability. Indeed, for those who want a background plot saturated with Arthurian-style chivalrous adultery, both Conall and Bronwyn could be married to other people, but could also be discovering feelings for each other . . .

Questions of the Emperor: One thing that's clear to most people in Ytarria in 2005 is that All Is Not Well with the Emperor of Megalos. The book reveals the terrible truth here, so players may learn it; however, their characters almost certainly won't, at least not for a long time.

Further, there's not much that the average bunch of PCs could do with this knowledge even if it seeped down from the brains of their players. Still, some GMs may be concerned that some groups might abuse the information. Fortunately for them, they're completely free to fix the problem by changing reality.

The Emperor could be exactly what he appears to be. He could even be competent, though that would mean the Empire would have to be better administered in a lot of places. So, perhaps he's just *moderately* competent, and moderately self-indulgent, but he's also the victim of an insidious and brilliant whispering campaign by a bunch of scheming nobles and churchmen. In that case, the PCs might learn the "truth" as in the book, and act on it -- only to find that they've become disposable pawns in a vicious scheme of usurpation.

Then again, perhaps Jordan Siegebriker's plot of 1989 worked perfectly, and the Empire is increasingly under the sway of the Templars. In that case, things could become very unpleasant for many of the inhabitants of Ytarria very quickly . . .

The Map

If the history and politics of Ytarria as we describe them aren't sacrosanct, nor is the geography. Messing with the map permits any number of added wars, commercial arrangements, or natural disasters. A substantial land border between Sahud and the Nomad Lands, more fertile land to the northwest (supporting a larger orc population), or less forest between Caithness and al-Haz, could all make for interesting events.

Changes to some *political* boundaries could simply be the result of a minor change to the history. Ytarria has seen numerous frontier wars over the centuries; tinkering with the results of any of them could move borders around. Caithness could be reduced to an endangered rump state, or expanded westwards as far as Castle Defiant -- or even the

coast! The Nomad Lands could be under Megalan domination. There could be Muslim outposts scattered across southern Araterre. Even Tredroy, fabled City of Three Laws, could be entirely controlled by any one of its three adjacent states. Of course, it would probably still be a diverse and decadent place, with the added fun that many of the citizens would be ripe for subversion by two different neighboring powers.

The Frontier Wars of 1991-1995 ended as a draw; a shrewd strategist among the western Megalan nobility, or an aggressive commander for the Wazifi armies, could have produced a different result. If Megalos had done better, the Legions could be pouring into the south, forcing al-Haz to mobilize, while ensuring political chaos in Megalos itself when the Megalan commanders notice that they are getting little help from the capital. If the Muslim powers had won, Megalos would either be frantically organizing to hold the line, or falling apart as the Emperor ignores the problem. It's also possible that the war could have ended with a treaty, but that one side could have captured some extra cities -- in which case, the victor would be having a hard time absorbing so many resentful new citizens.

Guns, Djinn, and Wood

Other variations could involve the magical forces which make this a genre fantasy setting, possibly even playing with the physics and metaphysics of Yrth's universe. For example, Ytarria doesn't have firearms, although there are several logical reasons why it arguably should. This situation has a *social* explanation: Guns are legally banned, and suppressed with ruthless efficiency. Some of our playtesters suggested that the reason could in fact be *magical*. If explosives and the like just don't work in Yrth's universe, there's far less weird social manipulation required. (Someone even suggested that it could just be *black powder* that doesn't work, leading to some interesting incidents over the last century or so, as other explosives filtered through from Earth to Yrth.) We rejected this idea because messing with the fundamental chemistry of a whole universe struck us as more arbitrary than an efficient conspiracy or three. Still, anyone who dislikes the Ministry of Serendipity and the Underground Engineers may wish to consider this alternative. (One associated idea, that can still be used in conjunction with the conspiracy, is that gunpowder is the equivalent of crack cocaine for fire elementals.)

Then again, fantasy settings don't *have* to exclude gunpowder and firearms; "muskets and magic" could be a nice change of pace. Perhaps the powers-that-be on Yrth gave up the struggle against this bit of technology. If firearms have been around for a century or so, warfare would resemble that of the Renaissance period on Earth, with cannon, pikemen, and musketeers -- plus battle wizards, and some select men guarding the artillery train against enemy magic and fire elementals. If such military technology has been developing for even longer, it could have progressed to the "Napoleonic" stage or later, with a focus on sheer firepower. At some point on such a development path, battle wizards will point out that they are no more effective at killing at range than any foot-slogger with a gun. At that point, they may say that actual fighting should be left to the untalented masses, and retire to staff positions providing intelligence services and logistical support.

The original **GURPS Fantasy** also set up the mystery of the Djinn Lands, in far southwestern Ytarria. We decided to resolve it. We're fond of the approach we took (naturally) but others could be equally valid. Perhaps the djinn are human wizards after all, or high-powered psionic adepts from another universe, or renegade demons, or even, simply, djinn. The other Big Mystical Mystery which we resolved was that of the expansion of the Blackwoods; GMs who dislike our approach there can decide that the obvious explanation which most people on Yrth believe ("Blame it on the elves") is in fact correct, or they can juggle with the precise cause, to taste.

Other magically-based variations could include anything from setting events on a more "spiritual" level -- perhaps even using Yrth as the setting for an **In Nomine** campaign -- to simply working out the logical and complete consequences of every spell in **GURPS Magic** being freely available. Anyone trying the latter should allow plenty of time and be prepared for a lot of debates . . .

Crisis on Infinite Yrths

Lastly, although Yrth is now, technically, part of the "Infinite Worlds" multiverse, it remains very hard to leave and a little tricky to enter. This is very definitely a deliberate design choice; this is the default **GURPS** setting for low-tech,

magical fantasy adventures, and not just another stop on the crosstime tour. Significant contact with other universes would change things too much, too quickly -- and in plot terms, the Ministry of Serendipity and its counterparts have long existed to control this problem.

But no one has to keep things that way. After all, Yrth's status as a "dimensional Sargasso" might be changed at any time by a breakthrough in N-dimensional parachronics or portalistic thaumatology. Infinity would be pleased to have easier access to the magical lore of a relatively comprehensible "fantasy" world (and the Cabal would be delighted), but very nervous at the possible implications of the changed status of this timeline. If forced to take sides, they'd probably try and stabilize the situation in Caithness and maybe promote independence movements in Araterre, while actually basing most of their operations in relatively benevolent, stable regions such as al-Wazif and Cardiel. (While running everything out of their offices in Tredroy). If Centrum gained any sort of access to Yrth, they might side with Megalos as a unifying force -- or, given its "willfully backward" noble heirarchy, they might instead conclude that they'd be better off promoting meritocracy in Cardiel.

If the parachronic breakthrough wasn't kept secret, and the major factions of the **Infinite Worlds** cosmology gained extensive access to Yrth, it would soon become a major concern for every Ytarrian. Local wizards are numerous and competent enough to give even the Cabal pause, and would doubtless be eager to associate themselves with other powerful magical adepts. Infinity Unlimited would have a hard job keeping the situation under control; the apparent "RenFaire" style of Yrth would only add to their problems, as various companies sought to initiate tourism on a world which a bit too dangerous for such things. And the Dark Elves, fearing an inundation of even more alien visitors, could turn into a veritable terrorist organization. They'd be willing to move Heaven and Yrth to keep the intruders out - - possibly literally . . . Meanwhile, everyone would have to wonder what Yrth's Jesuits or Templars were up to -- and what contacts they might have beyond their own world.

On the other hand, if some Ytarrian wizards gained magical transdimensional capability (without Infinity noticing), they'd probably try to plunder the multiverse for arcane knowledge and treasure, while avoiding contact with high technology. They might bring a few gadgets home for their own use, but they'd have to be careful not to attract the dread attention of the Ministry of Serendipity. Ytarrian PCs involved in "portalistic venturing" would doubtless find other worlds very strange. Their low-tech skills, and magical firepower would help them somewhat, but they'd need to be clever to avoid disasters.

An alternate "crossworld" game wouldn't even feature the Infinite Worlds cosmology. It could just involve exploration of multiple parallel *Yrths*, with alternate histories of their own. In some, perhaps, the Banestorm never happened, and the elves and dwarves remain dominant, although harassed by the orcs. Or, perhaps the Dark Elves were more right than they feared, and countless orc tribes lounge triumphantly in the ruins of a shattered Ytarria, mocking their elf and dwarf slaves. In other alternates again, the Banestorm may only have opened gates to Gabrook, and goblins are the dominant race, with a hybrid culture with many borrowed elf and dwarf elements. Or, there may just be a few immigrants from Loren'dil, causing less grief to the elder races. There might also be post-apocalyptic Yrths, Bane-blasted and infested with countless monsters, Yrths where human-imported technology has advanced at higher rates, or Yrths with a *lot* more high-mana craters . . .

Or even Yrths which look the same, but where some important people have very different personalities. But that's where we came in.

Get a Job

New Careers for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*

by Jody Macgregor

The career system is one of the defining elements of *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*; as well as presenting a unique way for characters to develop, it is a players' first glimpse of what makes the setting unique. Careers like Rat Catcher and Peasant don't exactly lend themselves to high adventure, and in a typical party half the characters will be illiterate. The careers don't just describe heroes (although they have those as well), but people from every level of Imperial society. The careers chapter is a window onto the setting every bit as evocative as the background chapter.

However, something as ambitious as describing the potential lifestyles of every member of such a diverse society is bound to have gaps. Certain combinations of skills, archetypes suggested by the setting, and roles beloved of gamers are missing. This article sets out to describe a few of these missing careers, although modeling every potential role a character could find in the Old World could take up the rest of your career as a gamesmaster.

Table 2-5: Starting Career

Career	Dwarf	Elf	Halfling	Human
Agitator	01-02	--	01-02	01-02
Apprentice Wizard	--	01-07	--	03
Bailiff	--	--	--	04
Barber-Surgeon	--	--	03	05
Boatman	--	--	--	06-07
Bodyguard	03-05	--	--	08-09
Bone Picker	--	--	04	10-11
Bounty Hunter	--	--	05-06	12
Broker	--	--	--	13
Burgher	06-09	--	07-08	14-15
Camp Follower	--	--	09-10	16-17
Charcoal-Burner	--	--	11-13	18-19
Coachman	10-11	--	--	20-21
Correspondent	--	--	14	22
Entertainer	12-14	08-12	15-17	23-24
Envoy	--	13-19	--	--
Estalian Diestro	--	--	--	25
Ferryman	--	--	18	26
Fieldwarden	--	--	19-22	--
Fisherman	--	--	23	27-28
Freak	15-16	20	24	29
Gypsy	--	21	25	30-31
Grave Robber	--	--	26-28	32-31
Hedge Wizard	--	--	--	32
Hunter	17-20	22-29	29-33	33-34
Initiate	--	--	--	35-36
Jailer	21-24	--	--	37
Kislevite Kossar	--	--	--	38
Kithband Warrior	--	30-36	--	--
Marine	25	--	--	39-40

Mercenary	26-31	37-41	34-37	41-42
Messenger	--	42-46	38-42	43-44
Militiaman	32-35	--	43-47	45-46
Miner	36-41	--	--	47-48
Nipponese Ashigaru	--	--	--	49
Noble	42	--	--	50
Norse Berserker	--	--	--	51
Outlaw	43-45	47-51	48-50	52-53
Outrider	--	52-57	--	54-55
Peasant	--	--	51-56	56-57
Pit Fighter	46-50	--	--	58-59
Protagonist	51-54	--	--	60-61
Rat Catcher	55-58	--	57	62-63
Roadwarden	--	--	--	64-65
Rogue	--	58-63	58-62	66-67
Runebearer	59-63	--	--	--
Scribe	64-65	64-69	--	68-69
Seaman	66	70-75	--	70-71
Servant	67-68	--	63-67	72-73
Shieldbreaker	69-72	--	--	--
Smuggler	73-75	--	68-70	74-75
Soldier	76-79	--	71-72	76-77
Squire	--	--	--	78
Student	80-81	76-80	73	79-80
Thief	82-84	81-86	74-79	81-82
Thug	--	--	--	83-84
Toll Keeper	85-87	--	80-81	85-86
Tomb Robber	88-90	--	82-85	87-88
Tradesman	91-94	87-93	86-90	89-90
Troll Slayer	95-98	--	--	--
Vagabond	--	94-00	91-94	91-92
Valet	--	--	95-96	93-94
Watchman	99-00	--	97-00	95-96
Woodsman	--	--	--	97-98
Zealot	--	--	--	99-00

Broker (Basic Career)

Description

In the trading capitals of the Old World, particularly the great port of Marienburg, a new mercantile system is emerging. Shares of ownership in businesses and ventures are traded at Exchanges, with cash only needed if someone sells up. A new kind of middleman is necessary to negotiate this complicated system and that is where the Brokers come in. The whole system seems mysterious, even arcane, to the average citizen (and its practitioners are often dubbed "financial wizards") as they see only a mass of young men in expensive clothing shouting at each other in a pit. Even outside of the pit, Brokers are loud and brash individuals who enjoy taking risks for their own sake.

Note: During character creation, if you take Common Knowledge (the Wasteland), your character can be from the great port of Marienburg at your option.

Broker Advance Scheme

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
--	--	--	--	+5%	+10%	+10%	+5%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
--	+2	--	--	--	--	--	--

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Law) or Gamble, Blather, Common Knowledge (the Empire) or Common Knowledge (the Wasteland), Evaluate, Gossip, Haggle, Lip Reading, Read/Write

Talents: Dealmaker, Super Numerate

Trappings: One Set of Good Clothing, Writing Kit

Career Entries: Burgher, Envoy, Scribe

Career Exits: Burgher, Charlatan, Merchant, Rogue

Correspondent (Basic Career)

Description

In The Empire's largest cities, where as much as a quarter of the population may be literate, printed broadsheets are catching on as a way of distributing the news more reliably than via town criers. These broadsheets vary in their integrity; the Altdorf Spieler is renowned for its honesty and zeal while the Carroburg Courier-Mail is a mere scandal rag for local gossip. Correspondents, also called ink slingers, are the writers for broadsheets, a job that requires a thorough knowledge of local politics and the ability to snoop. On slow-news days it requires a vivid imagination as well.

Correspondent Advance Scheme

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
--	--	--	--	+5%	+10%	+10%	+10%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
--	+2	--	--	--	--	--	--

Skills: Blather, Charm, Common Knowledge (any), Concealment, Consume Alcohol, Gossip, Perception, Read/Write, Search, Silent Move

Talents: Streetwise

Trappings: Writing Kit

Career Entries: Agitator, Messenger, Student

Career Exits: Charlatan, Demagogue, Rogue, Scholar

Freak (Basic Career)

Description

Freaks earn a living by exhibiting their deformities to the public. Some are true mutants, but these are rare in the

Empire because of its vigilant Witch Hunters. Other freaks, such as bearded ladies and midgets, have minor quirks. Yet other freaks are self-made and gain attention through the shocking acts they perform such as hanging themselves from hooks, hammering nails into their skin, or eating raw meat and chicken heads.

Freak Advance Scheme

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
+5%	--	--	+5%	+10%	--	+10%	--

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
--	+2	--	--	--	--	--	--

Skills: Charm or Consume Alcohol, Concealment or Intimidate, Dodge Blow, Haggle, Perception, Performer (any), Search, Silent Move

Talents: Contortionist, Flee!

Trappings: Freaks may take a roll on Table 11-1 Mutations or sort out a gimmick with the GM.

Career Entries: Entertainer, Zealot

Career Exits: Entertainer, Outlaw, Racketeer, Rogue, Thief, Vagabond

Gypsy (Basic Career)

Description

Gypsies are outcasts who have formed a rootless society of their own, traveling from one place to another, moving on when aggrieved locals drive them off. They make their livelihood through entertainment and fortune telling, sometimes resorting to trickery and petty crime. Gypsies travel in horse-drawn caravans, wear brightly colored clothes and are almost as superstitious as Ostlanders. Most gypsies are Vagabonds who have joined together for safety and shared community or the descendents of such. Rarer gypsy bands are members of a people whose lands were lost to them long ago. They refer to themselves as the Strigany and dark rumors about them abound; it is said that they practice necromancy and consort with vampires.

Gypsy Advance Scheme

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
+5%	+5%	--	--	+10%	+5%	--	+10%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
--	+2	--	--	--	--	--	--

Skills: Charm, Concealment, Heal, Haggle, Navigation, Outdoor Survival, Performer (any), Drive or Ride, Sleight of Hand, Speak Language (Strigany) or Secret Language (Ranger Tongue)

Talents: Rover or Trick Riding

Trappings: Boiled Cabbage, Deck of Cards, Musical Instrument

Career Entries: Bone picker, Entertainer, Vagabond

Career Exits: Charlatan, Hedge Wizard, Minstrel, Scout, Thief

Nipponese Ashigaru (Basic Career)

Description

Far to the east, beyond even Imperial Cathay, lies the island nation of Nippon. This exotic land is famed for its deadly warriors, the samurai, who make up its ruling caste. The Ashigaru, or lower-class samurai, are much more common and when Nipponese forces travel to the Old World it is the Ashigaru, with their long spears and gunpowder weapons, who go. In the Old World Nipponese are most common in Marienburg, where they have their own city ward called Niponsstad; however, Ashigaru may also find their way to the Empire as exiles, ship's crew thrown off course by the famously dangerous storms that threaten their land or diplomats and their entourages. Their fighting skills and discipline are highly prized.

Nipponese Ashigaru Advance Scheme

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
+10%	+5%	+5%	--	+10%	--	+5%	--

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
--	+2	--	--	--	--	--	--

Skills: Common Knowledge (Nippon), Concealment, Dodge Blow, Silent Move, Shadowing, Speak Language (Nippon), Sail

Talents: Etiquette, Specialist Weapon Group (Gunpowder), Strike Mighty Blow, Strike to Stun

Trappings: Light Armor (Breastplate), Spear, Pistol and 10 Shots

Career Entries: None

Career Exits: Burgher, Mercenary, Protagonist, Servant, Veteran

Note: If this is your Starting career, you are from Nippon.

Sewerjack (Basic Career)

Description

Someone has to keep the sewers empty of mutants and Outlaws while insuring that noxious gases don't build up to lethal levels and the older sections don't crumble underneath the people's feet. These thankless tasks are performed by Sewerjacks, and they number among the lowest of the low. Since the job is so unpopular, sometimes criminals are punished by being forced to serve terms as Sewerjacks. Others join the 'jacks because it's a good job to hide in; nobody asks Sewerjacks too many questions, for starters because they smell so bad. There are rumors among those who stay in the job for any length of time about man-shaped rats who dwell beneath the cities, but such nonsense is never taken seriously.

Sewerjack Advance Scheme

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
+10%	--	--	+5%	+10%	--	+5%	--

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
--	+2	--	--	--	--	--	--

Skills: Concealment, Consume Alcohol, Gamble, Perception, Scale Sheer Surface, Search, Silent Move, Swim

Talents: Street Fighting, Tunnel Rat

Trappings: Lantern, Light Armor (Leather Jack)

Career Entries: Outlaw, Rat Catcher, Thief, Thug

Career Exits: Cat Burglar, Militiaman, Racketeer, Watchman

Legalist (Advanced Career)

Description

In the more civilized parts of the Empire, particularly the southwest, the barbaric practices of settling legal matters by Judicial Champion or trial by fire are fading away. Their replacement is a system in which legal disputes are settled by words, not blows, and the representatives hired in these cases are called Legalists. It is the job of Legalists to advise their clients on the laws pertaining to their case and present that case before a Magistrate. One of the difficulties they face is that the laws of the Empire differ from province to province and sometimes from town to town. Even with a good Legalist, a fair trial is still a rare thing in the Empire.

Legalist Advance Scheme

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
--	--	--	+5%	+10%	+30%	+20%	+20%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
--	+3	--	--	--	--	--	--

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Law), Blather, Charm, Haggle, Perception, Read/Write, Speak Language (Classical)

Talents: Dealmaker, Etiquette or Streetwise, Public Speaking

Trappings: Robe, Wig

Career Entries: Burgher, Scribe, Student

Career Exits: Demagogue, Magistrate, Merchant

Magistrate (Advanced Career)

Description

It is the job of a Magistrate to hear all of the evidence in a court case and make a fair decision based on the rule of law. Magistrates adjudicate civil and criminal cases, but offences against the priesthood or the gods are tried by Witch Hunters and military crimes are dealt with by superior officers. Sentences meted out vary from warnings, through

fines, floggings, dismemberment, banishment, hard labor and execution, typically by hanging. Those who cannot pay fines are sentenced to debtor's prisons, like Nuln's infamous Mundsens Keep. Some settlements are too small to have their own Magistrate and may only receive visits from traveling judges once a year. By the time cases are heard in these settlements the evidence has often gone cold and the witnesses forgotten what they saw, which helps to foster a climate of lawlessness and vigilantism.

Magistrate Advance Scheme

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
--	--	--	+10%	+10%	+40%	+30%	+25%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
--	+4	--	--	--	--	--	--

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Law), Charm, Command, Common Knowledge (any three), Evaluate, Gossip, Intimidate, Read/Write, Search, Speak Language (any two)

Talents: Master Orator, Menacing, Public Speaking, Schemer, Strong-Minded

Trappings: Library of Legal Tomes, Robes, Wig

Career Entries: Legalist, Politician, Priest

Career Exits: Courtier, Demagogue, Politician, Witch Hunter

Revolutionist (Advanced Career)

Description

Revolutionists are Demagogues who have gone beyond championing simple causes and enjoying their popularity, and instead seek one thing only: the complete change of society at every level, at any cost. Revolutionists are not tolerated in the way Demagogues are, but are outright banned and must operate in secret through the underground, much like members of the forbidden cults. They may even wear masks and adopt false names to protect their safety.

Revolutionist Advance Scheme

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
+15%	+15%	+10%	+10%	+20%	+30%	+30%	+35%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
+1	+5	--	--	--	--	--	--

Skills: Academic Knowledge (any three), Charm, Command, Concealment, Disguise, Gossip, Intimidate, Perception, Performer (Actor), Read/Write, Search

Talents: Dealmaker, Master Orator, Public Speaking, Schemer

Trappings: Revolutionary Tracts in Progress, Writing Kit

Career Entries: Demagogue, Politician

Career Exits: Crime Lord, Outlaw Chief

Sleuth (Advanced Career)

Description

Crime is endemic to the Old World, and when the Watch are too lazy, corrupt, or stupid to catch the criminals, it falls to others. Some are mere vigilantes, but others are sharp-minded problem solvers who have turned their intellects towards mystery. Some work with the Watch, such as Rosanna Ophuls of Altdorf, whose visions have led to the arrest of more than one murderer; others work freelance, like Brettonia's Alphonse Hercules de Gascoigne, who claims to be the world's greatest detective. What they all have in common are quick wits, curiosity, and a nose for danger.

Sleuth Advance Scheme

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
+10%	+10%	+5%	+5%	+10%	+20%	+30%	+20%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
--	+3	--	--	--	--	--	--

Skills: Academic Knowledge (any), Common Knowledge (any), Concealment, Disguise, Intimidate, Lip Reading, Perception, Pick Lock, Read/Write, Search, Shadowing, Silent Move

Talents: Streetwise

Trappings: Magnifying Glass

Career Entries: Captain, Friar, Physician, Priest, Scholar

Career Exits: Spy, Vampire Hunter, Witch Hunter

Welcome to the Viking Pacific

by Paul Drye

Until conveyors and other world-hopping technologies are introduced, timelines are mostly isolated from each other. There are a few other ways to move across time, but they are usually small and difficult to control. Still, there are dozens of anomalies logged by Infinity agents, ranging from the Suhal Stone to the strange case of the ambassador of the Montagnard Republic. One of the largest and most inexplicable of them all is the South Pacific empire of Ångaland.

History

Ångaland's timeline was first contacted eight years ago, and dubbed Cretaceous-4 due to its dinosaurs. Unlike the other Cretaceous timelines, this one did have a mass extinction 65 million years ago, leading to dominant mammals as on Homeline. Despite the destruction, though, some dinosaur species survived on the Indian subcontinent and spread to the rest of the world after it collided with Asia 50 million years ago. Since then large mammals and dinosaurs have co-existed.

Once Infinity realized the change point was that far back, New Zealand was examined as potentially safer than the rest of this fierce world: it was submerged on Homeline during the Oligocene, reducing the major land animals to birds, bats, and lizards. The site of Auckland soon became Infinity's main point of entry to the timeline. By good luck, this put Infinity within 1,100 miles (1 800 kilometers) of one of the major islands controlled by Ångaland. Contact was made when a surveying plane overflew what appeared to be a medieval Scandinavian knarr in the ocean to the south of New Caledonia. A follow-up expedition showed that the ship's look wasn't a case of parallel evolution: it really was descended from a Viking trading ship.

The Patrol is used to seeing Vikings in unusual places -- their wanderlust and the vagaries of history mean that some timelines have them far afield by Homeline's standards. A Scandinavian South Pacific on a dinosaur world was beyond the pale, however; Paralabs researchers descended on Cretaceous-4 to explain the anomaly.

The sagas of the Ångalanders support the already-obvious conclusion that their ancestors are not native to Cretaceous-4, having come to this "new land" by what they believe to be a mystical accident some 25 generations ago. The current date is 1550 AD and Paralabs thinks that, about 500 years ago, the North Atlantic between Norway and Iceland "went Bermuda Triangle" on one or more timelines. The occasional fishing boat, trader, or colonizing ship would get snatched away and deposited at a spot to the south of Fiji on Cretaceous-4. A settlement of a thousand people built up on the main island of Viti Levu by the time the phenomenon ended a century later; unfortunately the timeline shifts stopped too far in the past and the surviving stories are too sparsely detailed to give Paralabs' investigators many clues as to why it happened.

Outworld Operations

Ångaland is rated P8 by Infinity, which is to say that it is accessible for large-scale trade and to all visitors except tourists. In the past two years it has become something like Johnson's Rome, except catering to agents on furlough rather than the general public. The primary draw is that the Ångalanders accept the concept of traveling between worlds, yet are hundreds of years away (at least) from being able to understand The Secret as anything other than magic. While in Ångaland, agents can be themselves and act naturally without fear of being discovered or causing a security breach. There's also the added attraction of getting to hunt dinosaurs on a timeline that has rustic human comforts as well.

There is some trading in and out of Cretaceous-4. In-bound, the primary trade items are guns and ammunition, beef, and luxury goods like silk. Though cheap on Homeline, these goods are either too high-tech, tough to raise in the

tropics, or not found in Ångaland at all. All command high prices, especially the AK-47s and shotguns that are the best weapons allowed for import. Travelers are advised to watch their weapons -- while the Ångalanders are generally honest, the prestige of owning a powerful firearm is so high it tempts many. All trade on the timeline goes through White Star Trading, though controls are lax and smuggling is rife for all goods but long arms.

As is typical for non-technological timelines, much of the trade outwards is in art objects: in the particular case of Ångaland, there is Homeline interest in their works in tropical wood. Most Scandinavian art is in metal, or else in low-quality wood that isn't particularly collectable. The Viking South Pacific, by contrast, uses mahogany and kwila wood. There is also some trade in locally available opals and spinels, which are too low in value for Homeline to want to set up their own mining operations on empty timelines.

Cretaceous-4's second-most important export behind art is dinosaur meat. While it is an acquired taste (contrary to expectations, it does not taste like chicken), the Ångalanders know more about preparing it as food than any other people anywhere: timelines where humans and dinosaurs mix are rare. The flesh of the fjathrathráll, a bird-like dinosaur, is a delicacy in fine restaurants and can fetch \$50 per pound; others like the rauthrsvín are worth far less.

Ångaland

The two main islands of Fiji are still the hub of Ångalander civilization, with about 40% of the 150,000 or so people in the whole country. The largest town by far, the seat of the king, is Halleby on the southwest coast of Viti Levu (or "Sanvágr," as the natives here call it). Most islands are colonized only along the southwest coast, as the rain shadow caused by the prevailing winds is needed to keep the wheat crops from drowning. Fortunately, the dry season corresponds with the local winter (May to September), when temperatures are also kinder to this badly misplaced plant.

By the end of the 14th century the Fijian islands had filled up, and the Ångalanders started expanding. In the 150 years since, they have discovered and expanded into the Tongan Islands and Samoa to the east, and New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, and the Solomon Islands to the west. On Cretaceous-4, most of these were inhabited by only plants, birds, and flying mammals similar to bats. They were a disease-free paradise for settlers and their domestic animals. It wasn't until the late 1400s and the first encounters with the larger wildlife of New Guinea that Ångalander expansion slowed. Even today, Papua and the Western Solomons are dangerous, jungle-choked frontiers as compared to the islands further east.

Ångalander Culture

Almost all people live in small villages of a few families, or even isolated farms on the coast. Farming is king, though the traditional Norse cattle have been supplanted by pigs and chickens better suited to the climate; similarly, while wheat is the staple, it is (to Homeline eyes) weirdly mixed in with coconut and sago. Fishing is also important, but most keep a boat for trading purposes too. Like their Norwegian ancestors, the Ångalanders will go to great lengths to acquire prestige items like steel weapons and jewelry. Fortunately, a royal monopoly on New Caledonia's iron deposits keeps the peace and raids are limited to pirates operating out of the many small, uninhabited islands.

To the surprise of Infinity's first contact teams, who were prepared for violence and xenophobia, the Ångalanders fell all over themselves in welcoming out-timers. It soon became apparent that they had long been troubled that they were cut off from European trade and missed much of what they thought was important: quality fabrics, glass, furs and ivory, "culture" from Germany and France, and so on. Even several centuries on, after most of these had become legendary, the desire to plug back into a wider world remained. Infinity opened the timeline to White Star three years ago, and since then goods have been flooding in.

In a broader sense, the Ångalanders are utterly fascinated with Homeliner culture and technology; the fact that they probably hail from a historical echo or alternate instead of Homeline is glossed over. They consider Infinity to be the means by which they have been reconnected to "their homeland." As a result, they are perpetually interested in what is going on in Norway, Iceland, and France (at the time of their transition to Cretaceous-4, the latter was becoming the center of European culture). Rather than risk wholesale contamination of the line with the 21st century, Infinity has

taken to passing on information about the 1200s. Ångaland has such a population deficit that it hasn't advance very much; even these limited connections are a sudden influx of 100 years of intellectual and technological development.

The one area where contact has raised problems is religion. Ångaland's settlers were Christian, but were cut off from Rome after the transition to a new timeline. Lacking anything better, they set up a parallel hierarchy with the Bishop of Halleby taking the position of Pope. Now that they are back in touch (the distinction between Homeline and wherever they actually came from again being ignored), the Ångalander Church is threatening to schism. Some natives want to dispense with what was only a necessary measure, while others -- and the now-hereditary Bishop -- want to carry on with the new ways.

Adventure Seeds for Ångaland

Might Be A Wolf: Now that trade is giving Ångalanders access to firearms, the more daring are expanding into western lands formerly too dangerous to colonize. Geir Herulfsson selected a choice location on the south coast of Papua for his steading, and for the first year all was well. In the last two months, however, four people have been killed -- within the walls, at night. The best guess it's some too-intelligent carnivorous dinosaur, probably of a kind never seen before. The murders have got to stop, or Geir's Halle will become a ghost town.

Bishop Takes King: Arnfinn II is the grandson of the man who united Ångaland into a single country. Unfortunately, he's now elderly and not all there. Just a few weeks ago, he reversed his long-standing policy of welcome for out-time religion in favor of the home-grown variety. Now several Philippine missionaries have been imprisoned and are going to be either executed or at least deported if Infinity will take them. Most suspect that Bishop Rollo of Halleby is behind all this; normally Infinity wouldn't care who was in charge, but he's interfering with a previously useful policy of openness. While negotiators stall for time, someone needs to rescue the missionaries. After that, the situation at the top can be corrected with impunity.

Beware the Door with Too Many Keys: The adventurers are present when a small, but advanced military ship drifts to shore not far from Halleby. Though heavily damaged and scattered with dead, a few survivors are still aboard and confusedly open fire. No matter who ends the situation or how, there's only one likely explanation: the natural gate to Cretaceous-4 has reopened, and its other end is somewhere advanced and warlike.

Pyramid Review

Ingenious

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Graphics by Kinetics & Binney Hare

Mounted fold-out board, four score tracks, 24 wooden scoring blocks in six colors, 120 tiles, cloth sack, four racks, & rules sheet, full color, \$34.95

Ingenious may not be the cleverest game to come down the pike, and its mechanics probably aren't groundbreaking, but it is another example of how the right product at the right time will strike folks just so.

The object of the game is to hold the best score at the end of the game.

The board is a grid of hexagons, with six starting spaces marked by six symbols that permeate the whole game. These read like a bowl of Lucky Charms cereal: red asterisk, yellow sun, purple ring . . . Everyone starts with a rack and six tiles (kind of like *Scrabble*); the plastic playing pieces are a pair of hexes connected along one side, also with game symbols. Some double up on the symbol they use, while others pair up different symbols (kind of like a selection of dominoes).

You want to match icons on the board to form a line of like symbols. For example, if there is a row of three adjacent green circle symbols and you place a tile with a green circle next to them, forming a straight line, you get three green points. If there are green circles next to your tile in other directions you count those too, so after a few plays there are enough tiles to give you some big numbers. Since you have two symbols per tile you may be able to score with the other end as well, which may or may not involve the same colors. Part of the strategy is deciding if playing your tile is worth it to get all those symbols. The next person may come along and use the tiles you scored plus your new tile to get an even better score.

Each player has a long score card with six wooden blocks on it. Each block is color-coded to one of the game's symbols. Colors are scored individually -- the three green points you got move the green block along the green track. Other colors are tracked separately, but if you place a counter with, say, both green and purple symbols it could get you points for both colors. Eighteen is the highest score for any color, and you no longer benefit from scoring those symbols (though you can do it just to keep others from getting them). When you get a color to 18, you do get an "Ingenious" -- a one-time free play of a second tile (which could lead to getting another 18, and so on). When you finish playing tiles, you draw to replace them from the cloth sack and end your turn.

Eventually the board fills up and no one can make any more plays. When this happens the game is over and the score cards are checked. Since the object is to raise all six of your score counters as high as you can, your total is actually the lowest counter you've got. If everything else went to double digits but you never got your blue cube higher than nine, then nine is your score. The "high" score wins.

Fantasy Flight spared no expense making the game. The board is a solid fold-out item, the playing pieces and the racks are tough plastic, and you get a swell cloth bag from which to draw new tiles. The rules fit on one sheet in full color. The score cards are nifty, though the little wooden blocks are small . . . they're not tiny, but you might lose them if you're not careful. The colors are irresistible.

The only real complaint is storage: There's a plastic insert that's supposed to keep the equipment, but it's really just a bin for placing the bag of tiles (the indents hold the fold-up board nicely, too). The score cards and rules just sort of sit on the top of this stack, and they slide around and make you feel like the box is never fully closed. Store it flat, or place it on the shelf between other games that will keep the lid shut.

Though **Ingenious** (also known as **Mensa Connections** and **Einfach Genial**) has shades of everything from **Othello** to **Twixt**, the game feels new. It's an intriguing and challenging pastime, the sort of process that grips you and draws you back for game after game. Something this simple isn't usually this replayable, but it's the sort of thing you can improve on, and once you've learned it you'll want to get better at it. It also has the mainstream appeal necessary to attract "non-gamers" to the table of an evening. You can even play it solo, trying each time to best your score, though you won't be catching it at its best. Fantasy Flight may go a little whacky with the components, but since it's going to be something you pull out a lot, you want something that's going to last.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Red Devils (for *Space: 1889*)

Published by [Noise Monster Productions](#)

Written by Jonathon Clements

Directed & Produced by John Ainsworth

Music & Sound Design by Steven Foxon

Starring Ivor Danvers (Sir Henry Routledge), Ian Brooker (Professor Sebastian Golightly), Jo Castleton (Georgina Golightly), Kevin Murphy (Doherty), Katarina Olsson (Miss Charlotte Wong), Rupert Wickham (Lieutenant Williams), Tam Williams (Prince Skerrun), & Simon Williams (Captain St. John-Ffolkes) with Anthony Daniels (Captain James Carter)

70-minute CD; £12.50

It is fair to say that outside of the computer game and the novel, the roleplaying game has fared poorly when adapted across to other media, especially television and film. Such adaptations have been few and far between, and the fan and the general viewer alike has universally derided all. Fortunately, with the latest intellectual transplant, we gamers can give our eyes a rest and instead put our ears to good use.

Red Devils is the first in a series of audio dramas published by England-based Noise Monster Productions set in the Solar System of ***Space: 1889***. Originally published by GDW in 1989 and later revived by Heliograph, ***Space: 1889*** is a Victorian-era science fiction game inspired by the works of H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, and Arthur Conan-Doyle, that cast the imperialism, colonialism, and attitudes of the late 19th century across the inner solar system. Travel and transport between the worlds inside the Asteroid Belt is achieved via Ether Ships that ride the luminiferous ether and are powered by the rays of the sun, while communication is enabled through the British Empire's system of orbital heliograph stations.

As *Red Devils* opens, the Ether Ship *Perbindesh* is in the final leg of its journey to Mars. Commanded by Captain James Carter, she carries a number of important and interesting passengers. Most notable is Sir Henry Routledge, the newly appointed Governor of Syrtis Major, whose peccadilloes include his young "niece," Miss Charlotte Wong. Hers is an uncomfortable position, being non-European and accepted only for her uncle's good standing. Professor Sebastian Golightly was once a noted scholar of Martian studies, but his eminence has dwindled, only to be rekindled with the acquisition of a new assistant, Prince Skerrun of the Martian city state of Alclyon. Armed with an Oxford education, the Prince is returning to his homeworld unsure of his future. The Professor comes to Mars accompanied by his daughter Georgina, aiming to conduct field studies and thus be able to publish again.

All seems normal aboard the *Perbindesh*; Captain Carter runs a tight ship with the aid of his executive officer, Lieutenant Williams. But the empty void between worlds is not always a safe space, and the ship is running silent for reasons that Captain Carter does not care to divulge. Not only is the *Perbindesh* threatened by the Feinian pirates from without, but from conspiracies within, as class and social differences chafe and ferment.

From the outset, *Red Devils* is a very English affair, which as a period science fiction drama has the feel of a *Dr. Who* audio adventure. This is not undeserved, as some of those involved in Noise Monster Productions has some experience with that oeuvre, but the feeling that odd-but-dapper man is about to step out of a British 1950's police box and save the day soon passes. Once beyond this point, the listener can settle down to be drawn into a tale all its own. For the initiate, the salient points of the ***Space: 1889*** setting are explained without the need for exposition, while the devotee will find that they help reinforce the setting's other worldly qualities that attracted him to the setting in the first place.

The story fair cracks along and all too soon the listener will find the 70 minutes coming to an end. You do need to pay attention during the climactic battle scenes, as events sometimes outpace the listener's ability to visualize, but this is always a problem with the audio drama format. The ending itself comes down to Earth -- or is it Mars? -- with something of a bump, as the "real politick" of the situation on the Red Planet is enforced. The final moments do set everything up for a sequel -- *The Steppes of Thoth*, which is also available. Noise Monster has parts three and four already planned.

Initially *Red Devils* feels a little clichéd in its portrayal of the period, but it quickly rises above that, due to the characterization and the performances. The cast is uniformly excellent, the only exception being that of the two female parts, which do suffer from being somewhat trite. However, this is the fault of the writing, and hopefully will be rectified in the sequel. Of course, the most notable member of the cast is Anthony Daniels, and it is pleasing to say that there is not a hint of the robot about his measured performance.

In production terms, *Red Devils* is excellent. The sound is crisp and sharp, while the CD is nicely packaged. It includes an eight page booklet that provides notes about its four main characters, a little about the setting itself taken from *Chadwick's Gazetteer of the Worlds*, and a centerpiece spread depicting the British crown colony of Syrtis Major. Such information is helpful for the initiate, but is probably not quite enough to be particularly useful.

It is easy to imagine how each of the characters could be defined in terms of the ***Space: 1889 RPG***, or indeed for the GM to run the events of the story as an adventure that would get his party from the Earth to Mars. In fact, it would make a pleasing change from the murder mystery aboard ship that begins many campaigns, something that the drama also avoids. The audio format is responsible for that, enabling the telling of a more exciting story more effectively than a visual budget would allow. The drama also neatly takes in the attitudes of the period, keeping them subtle rather than blatant, but above all *Red Devils* is a thoroughly enjoyable hour of listening. And it succeeds where a television or film version would fail, because in asking us to solely rely upon our ears, it is the listener that supplies the imagination and visual details. For fans of ***Space: 1889***, *Red Devils* is a treat, while devotees of Victoriana and science fiction should enjoy it just as much.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Tears Added to Ripples

Having lived in Florida for 80% of my life, and with my parents still living down there, I know first-hand the devastation that hurricanes can cause. My parents both worked in insurance (my mom still does), and so they heard story after story of the loss of property, limb, and even life.

But even the spate of three hurricanes that hit Florida last year (one of which [destroyed my car](#) in Pennsylvania) . . .

even the stories of how Miami was decimated a few years ago (including an amusingly sad tale about how the huge aviary at Miami Metro Zoo was ripped open, releasing the hundreds of rare and exotic birds) . . .

even the economic hardship that has befallen my family because these gargantuan storms virtually wrecked Florida's insurance industry at the same time it was literally wrecking cities . . .

even the fact that the hurricane in question -- Hurricane Katrina -- was the very same storm that had knocked out my parents' power for 28 hours, and led to a momentary panic on my part as I feared that the man killed in my parents' city might be one of my parents . . .

even given all of these markers to evaluate the effects of hurricanes in my own life, nothing I've experienced has even come close to what's happened -- and continues to unravel -- in Louisiana and Mississippi. A friend of mine lived in New Orleans for several years, and he's worried about the friends and co-workers he left behind. I worry about longtime industry guru Lou Zocchi, who was living in the path of Katrina, and who has not been heard from yet.

I worry about a lot of things.

One thing I find so amazing about the tragedy -- amid the nonstop coverage I've been reading and trying to digest -- is the effect this incident will have on the rest of the country and, as a result, the world. They say that one life touches so many others; we may experience first-hand what one city touches.

Today, amid speculation about what will happen to the price of gasoline, my wife and I had a discussion about what this would mean to our Christmas plans. Originally we either were going to drive to visit her parents in Michigan, or fly to visit her brother's family (complete with new baby) in Dallas. We had all but ruled out Dallas as prohibitively expensive [about a month ago](#), but had still planned on driving to Michigan; however, gasoline prices have more than doubled since we first made those plans, and they may be higher come the winter time; we've been trying to determine if, worst case scenario, a holiday trip is worth 2% or more of our annual income.

The situation had lead to some odd circumstances. As of last week we had a one-day "honeymoon" trip planned to Six Flags America, which is about two-and-a-half hours away in Maryland. But, although we might be willing and able to pay for rising gas prices, we've also needed to prepare for the contingency that we may not be able to buy any gas at all; it's not impossible that [places might run out](#), since this uncertainty and chaos has happened to fall right before one of the busiest travel holidays of the year. So we've needed to plan for a contingency of staying at a hotel at some point in our journey. And I've been doing the mental calculations about whether I can "risk" donating blood today . . . which I really want to do but would take about two gallons of gasoline to get to the donation center and back.

Reading these last two paragraphs again, I feel awfully selfish and shallow, babbling about gas prices when people are still clinging to life, trying to survive amid the chaos. I don't mean to sound that way. I'm mostly trying to wrap my mind around the massive ripples caused by waves that have long since passed . . . ripples that rebound and move in unexpected ways. And the realization that I may need to think more seriously about my plans five months from now because of a disaster in a city 1,200 miles away makes me realize how tied we all are.

History, like fiction, realizes this interconnectivity. The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand led inevitably -- if circuitously -- to universal women's rights in the western world. The invention of moveable type in Germany would eventually lead to decades of violence in Ireland. Trade sanctions on Naboo would ultimately cause the destruction of

Alderan.

But for now, I constantly click "reload" on the news websites, wondering and worrying. Will the people still trapped in New Orleans be saved? To what extent will we be able to recover, as a nation? And are the four days I spent working at an Origins booth next to Lou Zocchi the last time I'll see him? When the next huge hurricane hits -- as it inevitably must -- what will happen then?

New Orleans, I never knew you . . . but I wish you all the best.

--*Steven Marsh*

Essential Flame

for *GURPS*

By S. E. Mortimer

A previous article, ["Lighting the Way."](#) explored the various methods of providing lighting -- usually by means of a flame. This article outlines various methods of generating that flame. Most of the following methods can be found in many survival manuals but this article incorporates these methods into *GURPS* -- sorting them into their appropriate tech levels, discussing suitable skills, and listing the cost and weight of various tools and equipment.

Introduction

It is estimated that man first began to make use of natural brush fires about 1.5 million years ago, but it wasn't until around 500,000 BC that *Homo erectus* first employed artificial means to light fire (p. LT15). In *GURPS Third edition* there are two separate skills for lighting a fire using primitive technologies -- Bow and Palette, and Flint Sparking (both are described on p.CI152), but in *Fourth edition* these are subsumed into the Survival skill (pp.B223-24). Separate skill rolls are required to make the required tools, find suitable materials and fuel, and to actually light the fire. The latter roll is based upon DX rather than Perception, and involves successfully using the tools to create a smouldering ember and then coaxing that ember into a flame. There are several methods that can be employed to do this. They usually involve generating heat from friction, using a direct spark, or focusing heat from the sun (see *Fire Starting*, below).

Tinder

Tinder consists of a small wad of highly combustible material such as dried leaves, grass, moss, fungus, fluffy bark, dried manure, pulped wood fiber, paper, fiber wadding, woven fabric, and the like. Once the tinder is set alight, a larger fire can be built over it, or the flame can be transferred to a fire that has been prepared elsewhere. Alternatively, it may be transferred to a light source, such as a [candle or lamp](#).

Tinder Box (TL0): A small, waterproof box used to contain tinder. Since tinder catches alight more easily if it is already charred (just like a candle or lamp wick), fresh tinder is placed underneath the older material, leaving the partially burned tinder on top. A tinder box is commonly used with the *direct spark* method of ignition (see below) and often flints and steel are stored in the tinder box. Some have steel strikers permanently fixed to one side of the box or on the lid. Virtually all of the ignition techniques described below require a small wad of dry tinder, so it would be sound advice for anyone expecting to spend some time outdoors to carry some tinder in a waterproof container. Anyone with a Survival skill will always be on the lookout for material suitable for his tinder box while he is working, hiking, camping, etc. The GM can assume that a character's tinder box is always full unless there is an extended period of time when suitable material is unavailable. But even in these situations tinder can usually be improvised from things such as clothing (cotton is good), wood shavings from a weapon shaft, gunpowder, and so on.

Tinder Tube (TL4): This is also used with the *direct spark* method of ignition (see below). Some have called this the original "cigarette lighter." It consists of a metal tube between one and two inches long and around one quarter of an inch in diameter, with a length of cord (made from a natural fiber such as cotton) inserted. The end in the tube is deliberately charred. As previously stated, charred material catches alight more easily than fresh material and the metal tube is intended to prevent the charring from rubbing off the cord. To light it, a short length of the charred end is pushed out of the tube and held on top of the flint near the edge. The flint is struck along the steel, causing a spark to skip onto the charred cord. It is then blown gently to cause the ember to spread over the end of the cord. This smouldering end can be applied to, say, a candle wick, a tobacco pipe, or a matchlock firearm. After use, the smouldering end was pulled back into the metal tube to smother it. Sometimes the tube had a metal cap. Tinder tubes

were used throughout World Wars I and II because they were less likely to attract sniper fire; they are still used today in rural Spain (called "shepherd's lighters").

Fire Starting

Modifiers: Besides skill modifiers from the tools themselves (listed with each item description), there are general modifiers that apply no matter which ignition method is being used. They include:

- +3 if two people work together, with one person blowing gently on the tinder while the other works to ignite the fire
- -5 if the tinder is wet
- -3 if the tinder is only damp
- -3 if the equipment is wet
- -2 if conditions are particularly windy

Some of the tools listed below are so easy to use that no skill roll is normally required (e.g. matches, cigarette lighters, lenses, etc.) However, the GM may still require a skill roll if conditions are particularly difficult (e.g. strong wind, wet fuel, etc.)

Familiarity: Even though the same skill is used for all fire starting methods, it takes a while to learn how to light a fire with each different tool. This can be handled with the Familiarity penalties on p. 169 of the *Basic Set*. That is, it takes eight hours of use to become familiar with a piece of equipment. Until this time, skill rolls are at -2.

Time: Unless specified differently in the item's description below, it takes at least one minute and a successful Survival skill roll to light a fire, once all the required materials have been assembled. As stated above, this skill roll is used to create a smouldering ember and then coax that ember into a flame. On a success, the tinder erupts into flame and will quickly need to be fed with additional fuel before it burns out. On a failure, the character may spend an additional minute and make another skill roll, but at a penalty of -1 (see p.B348 for *Repeated Attempts*). On a critical failure, a piece of equipment breaks (possibly resulting in injury) and can no longer be used. A replacement will need to be found or a different ignition technique can be attempted instead. On a critical success it only takes *half* the normal time.

The Fire: Once started, a fire must have fuel to continue burning. Survival rolls can be made once per hour to find appropriate firewood (see p.LT15 for skill modifiers). A successful skill roll finds enough fuel to stop a fire from dying out for 12 hours, or to feed a fire suitable for cooking and warmth for 1 hour.

Ignition Methods

Friction

All of these methods, at their most basic level, involve rubbing two sticks together. Dry, seasoned timber is required, but some types of wood are more suitable than others. Some timber will not work no matter how dry it is or how good your technique. It might take an hour or so and a successful Survival skill roll to locate suitable timber. Failure results in nothing appropriate being found during that hour. A critical success results in ideal material being found giving a bonus of +2 to the skill roll to light the fire. Inappropriate materials might warrant a penalty of -1 to -3 to the skill roll.

Two Sticks (TL0): Probably the first method ever used to light a fire by means of friction. It involves vigorously rubbing two sticks together until one of them begins to smoulder. It is very difficult to light a fire in this manner and a great deal of effort must be expended. One skill roll can be made per minute at a -4 penalty and each attempt uses three points of Fatigue.

Fire Saw (TL0): Used by Australian aboriginals. It is an improvement on the above method and requires at least two people. A piece of hardwood is partially split down the middle and held apart with wooden wedges and tinder packed

into the split. One person stands astride this timber to hold it down while the second person rubs another piece of wood vigorously back and forth in a sawing action along the top, directly above the kindling, working between the standing man's legs. This technique can be exhausting -- each skill roll uses two points of Fatigue and has a skill penalty of -2.

Fire Plough (TL0): Commonly used by Pacific Islanders, it involves rubbing the end of a wooden shaft (the "plough") against an elongated wood base (the "palette" or "hearth board"). A good palette is made from dry timber that has a low density and poor heat conductivity. To begin, a long straight groove is cut into the palette. The end of the plough is then placed into the groove and vigorously rubbed up and down. If done correctly, a black dust (charred wood powder sometimes called "char") will accumulate at the end of the groove and eventually begin to smoulder. This technique can be exhausting -- each skill roll uses two points of Fatigue and has a skill penalty of -2.

Drill and Palette (TL0): Similar to the fire plough except that instead of a long groove, a hole is made in the palette near the edge. A V-shaped slot is cut between the hole and the edge to allow the char to accumulate in a small pile. The end of a long, straight, hardwood spindle (the "drill") is set into the hole and spun rapidly back and forth between the hands (both hands must be free to attempt this). It is often difficult to find a suitably long, thin, straight section of timber to use as a drill. Also, beginners often find it difficult to get enough downward pressure to generate enough friction for ignition. A mouth piece can be added to the top of the spindle, enabling the head and neck to apply additional downward pressure. This technique uses two points of Fatigue per skill roll and has a skill penalty of -1.

Bow and Palette (TL0): Instead of spinning the drill in both hands, a small bow is constructed with the string looped once around the drill. As the bow is moved back and forth, the drill spins. Only one hand is required to move the bow so the spare hand can be placed on top of the drill for additional downward pressure. It takes about the same amount of time to light the tinder but it is less tiring -- only one point of Fatigue is lost per skill roll. If cordage is available, it takes 10 to 15 minutes to make a fire bow. Typical bows are one foot in length or longer (Modifier of +0), but skilled practitioners can reliably produce fire from a bow less than six inches long (at a -1 penalty). The advantage of the smaller bow and palette is that they can be carried in a pocket.

Pump Drill (TL1): Similar to the bow and palette except that the drill is rotated using a more complicated mechanism. Instead of moving a bow back and forth, a crossbar is pumped up and down. Cord is wrapped around the drill and attached to both ends of the crossbar and a heavy weight is attached around the drill. This weight is necessary to provide momentum to the spinning drill. It takes about the same amount of time to light the tinder but no fatigue is lost. Modifier: +0.

Matches (TL6): Robert Boyle was the first to use phosphorus to light sulphur coated wooden splints in 1680, but the first friction matches were not made until 1827 by John Walker. These consisted of a mixture of antimony sulphide, potassium chlorate, gum, and starch. These matches were dangerous -- they ignited explosively, burned with a pungent odor, and the fumes were toxic. A few years later Charles Sauria began to experiment by adding phosphorus to the mixture. It made the match easier to light but was even more toxic and some had a tendency to spontaneously ignite. In 1845 the invention of red (amorphous) phosphorus enabled safer matches to be produced. In 1855, "safety matches" were made by separating some of the components of the match head and putting them on an abrasive strip on the side of the box. When the match head is rubbed against this "striker" the components mix together and the friction generates heat, causing a chemical reaction that produces a flame. Paper matches (book matches) were invented in 1889 by Joshua Pusey. Matches can be waterproofed by coating them with wax. Most survival enthusiasts work from the adage, "one fire, one match," so theoretically, a box of 50 matches can start 50 fires. In practice this isn't always the case, though. Matches are listed among the camping and survival gear on page 288 of the *Basic Set* and no skill roll is normally required to light a fire with them.

Direct Spark

Fire can be created when hot sparks land on flammable material. The only difference between the following techniques is the means used to produce those sparks.

Stone Sparking (TL0): Two rocks are required; one must have small bits of iron in it (fine crystals of iron pyrite work well), and the other must be hard and non-porous. The two rocks are struck together producing sparks -- some of

which will hopefully land on the tinder. This method is more time consuming than friction techniques, but doesn't require as much physical effort. Each attempt to light a fire takes five minutes instead of the usual one, but uses no Fatigue. Modifier: -2.

Flint and Steel (TL2): Dating back to the early iron age, high-carbon steel was discovered to more efficiently strike sparks than using minerals containing iron. The sparks come from the steel, not the flint, and any hard rock that will fracture to a sharp edge can be used to strike them, not just flint. Other suitable materials include agate, bloodstone, carnelian, jade, obsidian, and quartz. When the edge becomes dull it needs to be chipped back to a new sharp edge. A flint and steel is commonly used in conjunction with a tinder box (see above). Either the tinder is taken out of the box and a wad is placed near the fireplace, or the sparks are struck directly into the box. To light a fire, sparks are struck onto the tinder until it begins to glow. Some of the tinder is then gathered up around the glowing ember and blown gently until it starts to spread, and then blown harder until it bursts into flame. Another method involves holding some charred tinder on the flint and striking the steel as described with the *Tinder Tube*, above. It is fairly easy to master the technique required for using flint and steel (skill modifier +0). Anyone with a Survival skill will always be on the lookout for suitable replacements for his flint and the GM can assume that a character always has a couple of spares in his tinder box.

Metal Match (TL6): A high tech version of the flint and steel. It is a short metal rod made from a pyrophoric alloy such as *ferrocium* -- a combination of iron and the rare earth element, cerium. More advanced alloys also include magnesium oxide, and other rare earths such as lanthanum, neodymium, and praseodymium. When the edge of a knife or other hard, sharp object is scraped down the ferrocium rod, bright sparks are produced. It is a simple process to direct these sparks onto some tinder. This material is also the "flint" in cigarette lighters (see below). It is a simple matter to ignite a fire with a metal match. Modifier: +2.

Cigarette Lighters (TL6): The first *automatic* ("one finger, one motion" mechanism) cigarette lighter was patented by Ronson in 1926. It was called the "Banjo" and initially retailed for about \$5. Other companies soon followed suit. Blaisdell developed the Zippo windproof lighter in 1932 and these retailed for less than \$2. A cigarette lighter consists of a butane reservoir underneath a steel striker wheel and a small piece of *ferrocium* (see *Metal Match*, above), often called the "flint." A finger or thumb is used to flick the wheel around and depress a button to release the butane. The sparks created by the wheel rubbing against the flint cause the butane to ignite. While the button is depressed the flame continues to burn. Some lighters have a flip lid instead of a button and butane continues to be released until the lid is closed. Modern disposable lighters are made from transparent plastic so one can determine the level of fuel left in the reservoir. One of these lighters will produce continuous flame for about 10-15 mins. No skill roll is normally required to light a fire with a cigarette lighter. Once the fuel runs out it might still be possible to use sparks from the lighter to ignite some tinder. This would require a Survival skill roll at +1.

Electricity (TL6): An electric battery (e.g. from a car or flashlight) can be used to light a fire. Two wires are first connected to the battery terminals. When the wires are shorted-circuited (touched together), sparks form. As with other sparks, if they land on tinder, it can ignite. A Survival skill roll at +2 is required to successfully do this. A more effective method is to connect the terminals to fine steel wool. When the steel wool glows red hot it can be applied to the tinder and coaxed into a flame. A skill roll is not normally required for this method.

Sunlight

This requires some sort of solar collector -- either a parabolic reflector or a transmissive lens -- to concentrate the heat from the sun into a small area. Naturally, this method cannot be used at night time or on heavily overcast days.

Transmissive Lens (TL0, TL3): The most common method is to use a glass lens (TL3) such as a magnifying glass or a pair of spectacles (those that correct near-sightedness only). A temporary lens can be made from a piece of ice (TL0). To make an ice lens, start by shaving it with a knife and then grinding it to shape on an abrasive rock. It can be finished by using the heat from your hands to smooth it. Using a lens to achieve ignition works best in bright

Soda Pop Can Reflector

The bottom of most aluminum soda pop cans is concave enough to be used as a parabolic reflector. The first step is to polish it. If a suitable cloth and metal polish (such as jeweler's rouge) are available then this will only take ten minutes or so. Improvised

sunshine where it should only take a few (2d) seconds. Hold the lens perpendicular to the sun and move it back and forth until the focal point is on the kindling (the sunlight will form a small bright dot). Keep the lens in this position until the kindling starts to smoulder and then blow on it until it ignites. Under calm, sunny conditions, no skill roll is necessary to light a flame with a lens.

Parabolic Reflector (TL2): A highly polished, concave metal plate can be used to concentrate and focus sunlight onto a piece of kindling in a similar manner to a lens. A reflector is generally more efficient than a transmissive lens and can be used to create a flame even on lightly overcast days. A thin splint of wood is slit at one end and a small piece of tinder is inserted in the slit. This tinder is held at the focal point of the reflector until it smoulders and catches alight. On a sunny day this will only take a few (2d) seconds. The focal point can be found by slowly moving the tinder in and out and observing the point at which it smoulders the most. Specially-made parabolic reflectors can be purchased in some camping stores but they can be easily improvised in the field. A shallow bowl covered with aluminum foil can make a crude reflector. Most modern flashlights can be disassembled and the reflector removed. Even the bottom of a soda pop can will make a serviceable reflector (see textbox). Under calm, sunny conditions, no skill roll is necessary to light a flame with a reflector.

polishes (toothpaste, powder cleanser, etc.) can take anywhere from 15 mins to an hour to achieve a suitable mirror surface. Even a bar of chocolate can be used in an emergency. The chocolate is used as the polishing agent and the wrapper is used instead of polishing cloth (this method will take at least an hour). Once a mirror shine is achieved on the bottom of the can, it is used just like any other parabolic reflector. The reflector is pointed at the sun and the tinder is held at the focal point of the reflector until a flame ignites.

Equipment List

Item Description	TL	Weight	Cost	Time	Mod	Notes
Bow & palette	0	0.25 lb	\$1	1 min	+0	uses 1 Fatigue
Pump drill	1	1.0 lb	\$10	1 min	+0	
Flint & steel	2	0.25 lb	\$3	1 min	+0	
Par. reflector	2	neg.	\$1	2d secs	N/A	small reflective dish
Trans. lens	3	neg.	\$5	2d secs	N/A	magnifying glass
Matches	6	neg.	\$1.50	1d secs	N/A	box of 50 (B288)
Metal match	6	neg.	\$20	2d secs	+2	need sharp edge for sparks
Cigarette lighter	6	neg.	\$2	1d secs	N/A	10-15 mins burn time
Tinder box	0	0.25 lb	\$1			
Tinder tube	4	neg.	\$3			

Tattoo You v2.0

for Transhuman Space

by R. J. Heath

"Hey, Barb! Wow, I see you got rid of your 'tribals' entirely! But, I thought they were permanent inks?"
"They were, but I went out and got Slytech's new tat remover, Eraskiner™. Took them off without messy elective surgery! One application a day for a week and they were gone! Now my skin is like a fresh, new canvas!"
Bored of that old tattoo? Want the "clean look" now that you're looking for legitimate corporate work, but you don't want to go through skin grafting or laser burning? Get Eraskiner™, from the chemical wizards at Slytech!
-- Quick pop-up vid for a fine product that unfortunately suffered from a rash of . . . well, rashes. (Excerpt from *The Satirist's Book of Things That Came (and Went) Before Their Time*)

Making your mark in the world is a primal urge that is as old as the human race. To some, the world around them is their medium, and they make their mark with paint, stone, or large sheets of brightly colored canvas. For others, it takes a more "personal" workspace to display their inner feelings and ideas.

Aside from the cultural arguments that can be made for and against tattooing, the old concerns of health and hygiene have become, in this day and age, almost moot. (If one goes to a respectable tattoo artist, that is; Caveat emptor; for those who decide not to¹.) Inks are pure and hypo-allergenic, and the tools used for making them nearly make the "inker" unnecessary. Aside from that, the amount of different types of "inkings" can make the choice of self-expression that much more customer-friendly. Average tattoo costs range from \$200-\$500 per. sq. ft., depending on quality of the artwork you want.

Temporary Tattoo: If someone can't decide if a tattoo is for him, or wants to go to New Malibu with a tough-looking tat for Spring Break, and then come home as fresh as new fallen snow, then a "temp-tat" is the answer. Pick or fabricate a design, put the soon-to-be-offended body part into a scanner, and hit "print." Voila! A very thin sheet of inked plastiskin pops out of the 3-D printer all ready to be applied. It will look completely realistic and well-proportioned to the features and curves of the skin. (\$50/sq. ft., TL8)

A more permanent form made of sensa-skin is available. It will become part of the flesh like sensa-skin is wont to do . . . sort of a poor man's cheat. Those who get this process are warned to be careful if they should want a more permanent version of the same tattoo; it should be inked professionally instead. When the sensa-skin becomes set, the resettling pseudo-skin cells often muddy the inks, leaving it all blurry and undefined (one-in-three chance of this happening over the next week after application). (\$100/sq.ft.; TL9.)

Both of these options will add +1 to disguise rolls where the fake tattoos have to be identical to the target's tattoos.

Moving Pictures: A beautiful static image can be captured on flesh that accentuates and is accentuated by the movements of that parcel of skin. (How many people's ancient uncles had a hula girl tattoo that "danced" when he moved a liver-spotted appendage?) But what if you could make the images move by your mental command?

Taking a page from the cuttlefish, nanorobotically created and controlled pseudo-chromatophores in the skin turn on and off in preset patterns created by a computer, creating designs like the liquid-crystal displays of the old days. One can make either a moving picture, like a writhing, flame breathing dragon; or have a tattoo that disappears completely when you have that family reunion to go to. It can be as intricate as the wearer is willing to pay for. Add bioluminescence for truly interesting effects! Exotic dancers take note. (TL9: Double cost for basic movement (on/off included)/triple for intricate ones, at the GM's discretion; bioluminescence adds half again after all costs are figured out². +1 towards applicable performance or seduction rolls, as determined by the GM).

Tattoo-Be-Gone: Unlike Eraskiner™, most tattoo removal agents today are much less likely to damage the skin, leaving scars and tattoo-shaped areas of damage. They just attacked and broke up the pigments that made up the tattoos, not encapsulating them and carrying them off to the body's waste organs like today's do. The nanomachines in the old agents either created unwanted waste products that reacted badly with the surrounding tissues or created too much residual heat themselves. In effect: skin burns from the inside out. (Roll HT-2 per dose if stuck using old style products, which were at high TL8-low TL9; failure leaves scars, critical failure requires surgery. More modern treatments -- available mid-TL9 -- will only scar on a critical failure of HT rolled at the beginning and end of treatment. Any nano-influenced bonuses to health will apply, of course.) (\$20/dose per sq. ft.; five doses per week).

Full-Body Dye-Job: "If you don't like something, change it," is what the body-mod addicts often say. But, what if you want to change all 14 to 18 square feet of "the body's largest organ"?

Well, you're in luck if you just don't like the color of your skin. Take a dip in a special nano-bath and after a tingling 20-30 min. you will have a brand new hue . . . I mean, brand new you! Just like an egg before Easter.

So, you can give yourself a great-looking tan that never fades (Been to Rio lately?), make yourself any color of the visible spectrum (I hear that black is the color of choice for some pointy-eared reality gamers on Luna), or bizarre pattern of your choosing (Pink-and-blue zebra stripes? Sure!). One gal had her skin changed to the color of parchment and then had the Declaration of Independence tattooed all over, resulting in a throng of admirers wishing to sign their names in big letters.

Those tempted to run down to their local vat should note that this process is permanent; the only way to fix it is to redo this expensive service. This completely changes the pigment-making cells on your skin (and hair, if you want) to produce different amounts of pigments, or even produce colors not normally found in the range of skin tones. Also, certain things, such as metallic sheens³ and curing complete albinism, are beyond this bit of technology. (\$5,000 for each change, with choice of hair color and patterns included in the price; TL9.)

Hands-Up-Display: This is something for those who want to have info at their fingertips, but don't want to have their hands full. A screen is "printed" into the palm or forearm, similar to the aforementioned moving pictures but on a more precise scale in a small area. Back-lit by bioluminescence, and controlled by pressure-sensitive micro sensors in the skin, the person can use a stylus (i.e. finger) to scroll, type, or whatever someone could do on a similar-sized comp screen, without the bulk of external equipment that can be lost or stolen. It requires a neural interface to use; if someone got a neural jack as well, he can hook into a ship's computer, and then be effectively piloting with his palm.

Technically, someone could have this printed on other areas of skin as well, but, unless he's either a nudist or very flexible, it's not recommended. (\$2,000, six hours to implant, takes a week for systems to work themselves out⁴; TL mid-high-9).

Many of these products and technologies can replace or supplement other tech, or even be combined themselves. Thus a spy might have camouflage skin that he can turn on and off (adding possible pluses to stealth and camouflage skill rolls). Or someone might have tattoos that reveal maps, tech designs, or simple text, which can be revealed either at the wearer's will or under certain other circumstances, such as only being visible under UV light. (This is possible right now.) Or a tattoo might only be visible by a certain race's visual senses, used to identify clan or tribe. Let your imagination lead you.

Footnotes-

¹ Aside from the requisite health checks in this case, truly evil GMs can make the artist make skill checks. Failure leads to a badly rendered tattoo (-1 reaction from aficionados, if they see it), critical failure can lead to . . . well, rather funny situations ("What do you mean, 'Who's Kelly?' I don't know any . . . wait . . . Shelly! Come back!").

² These tattoos run off of the body's own energy (simple sugars, body heat, etc. - whatever the GM decides.) If desired, moving or glowing tattoos may raise the temperature of the skin they're on. This can be either small affect (+1-5

degrees; similar to the feel of a low-grade fever on the skin) or big (+6-10 degrees; above this will affect core temperature), depending on the amount of skin covered. This can lead to hits on endurance if temps get high enough and also can make one a better target for heat-seeking weapons.

³ The level of metals needed to bring such sheen to the skin is far beyond toxic to the average human. Unless someone plans to use body paints, there's no hope of surfing in silver skin.

⁴ These are a combo of biological technologies and cyberware. They run off of both the body's energy like "Moving Pictures" do, but they also run off the power sources the character's other cyber implants do; thus the integration time.



by Daniel Bronson

Watch . . .

A weathered shaman welcomes his long-tested apprentice to the final trial, marking the young man as the one who will take his place.

Watch . . .

The tattoo that will forever herald this transition slowly and painfully takes shape with each jab of a native thorn -- from the master's fresh blood, to the red dust, to the flesh of the student, and back again.

Watch . . .

With every cycle untold multitudes of invisible trespassers ride the thorn into their new host, ready to invade, ready to multiply, and ready to open another mind.

Watch . . .

* * *

Can you hear the voices?

The little ones, the quiet ones, the insistent ones that no one else can hear? The ones that tell you that you aren't alone in your mind?

They just might be right.

That infectious diseases can affect the mind is not a new concept; it made it into the literature at least as early as 1896. Widespread acceptance of the idea took longer but there is no doubt now of its truth. After all, everyone has heard of mad-cow disease and its variants, the effects of rabies are well-known, and even in the early 1900s it was acknowledged that late-stage syphilis could induce progressive dementia. More recent studies and new technologies continue to add to the list of microbes that have potential mind-altering abilities.

Scientifically suggested connections now exist for streptococcal infections (obsessive-compulsive disorders, Tourette syndrome), Lyme disease (mental confusion, memory deficits), leptospirosis (depression, dementia), and Borna virus (schizophrenia), just to name a few. Clearly, not all mental illness is due to infection and not all infections will lead to mental changes, but where the connection does exist there waits a 10' by 10' treasure room full of opportunities . . .

Cat & Mouse

Toxoplasma gondii is a single-celled protozoan with a lifecycle that takes it from cats to rats and back. The second

half of that cycle requires that the cats consume the rodent host, which isn't something the rodents are particularly keen on. Consequently, *T. gondii* has developed a trick for making infected rats better prey. First, it causes them to become attracted to the smell of cat urine. Second, it tends to make them jittery. What you end up with is a rat that hangs around where cats can be found and has trouble sitting still when it needs to hide. Voilà: the perfect cat bait.

Humans can also become infected, generally from interaction with cat feces or handling infected meat. If the protozoan forms cysts in the brain it can result in women who are friendlier, and men who are more suspicious, compared to the norm. It may also lead to delusions and auditory hallucinations. While these latter, more extreme effects could certainly be replicated in a gaming setting, it might prove more interesting to scale the cat-rat relationship up to a human level.

Start with a large predator, be it a dragon, a great cat, or a pointy-toothed alien with overactive salivary glands. Next, select the prey. Elves, humans, and humans-with-funny-foreheads would all be good choices. Add a *T. gondii*-like microbe and mix well. Now you've got a group of people -- a cult, if you will -- fascinated by a mighty creature that anyone in their right mind would avoid like the plague. They hunt it out, offer it sacrifices (either of themselves or others), and live their lives to serve it . . . no matter what it does. This isn't because they seek power, or because want to show how macho they are, but because the chemicals released by the cysts in their brains tell them to.

Of course, it's always possible that what the human is obsessed by isn't the next host itself but a vector organism. Mosquitoes, biting flies, or rats (and their fleas) could be considered fascinating, depending on the needs of the microbe.

As You Command

Rabies. The one word is enough to conjure up everything from "Old Yeller" to werewolf origin theories. It certainly has a well-deserved reputation given the deadliness of the disease, and it can cause a wide variety of mental symptoms in humans -- from anxiety and confusion to hallucinations and insomnia. Unfortunately for the rabies virus, none of that has much chance of helping it reach its goal of being passed on to a new host before the current one dies. It gets better results from its work in other mammals, where the "furious" type of rabies (as opposed to the "dumb" or paralytic type) drives creatures to attack anything, transferring the virus to a new host with every bite.

The take-home message here is that these miniscule organisms have the same objective as pretty much all of the other living things out there: survival through propagation. To do so successfully requires that it have some way to move from host to host, and having the ability to convince the host to work for it is a major coup. Applying this notion to microbes with other modes of transmission, and again scaling up to the human level, can provide some intriguing results.

For example, there are plenty of sexually transmitted diseases out there that are content to rely on humanity's natural desires to spread to new hosts, but what about one that induced ever-increasing cravings for intercourse? Similarly, an organism that uses airborne droplets to hop person-to-person could benefit from causing some degree of autophobia. Paranoia might even be a useful thing to inflict on a host if doing so meant that person was more likely to survive during an organism's long incubation period.

It's Not So Bad . . . Once You Get Used To It

And then there's *Dicrocoelium dendriticum*, a parasitic flatworm known for the effect it has on ants. Normally these ants live low in the grass, foraging during the day and returning to their underground nests for the night. Once infected, however, the ants take a break from routine. While they keep the same day job, when evening approaches they climb to the top of a stalk of grass, grab onto it, and wait there until morning . . . which means they're perfectly positioned to be consumed by grazing sheep and cows -- the next hosts in *D. dendriticum*'s rather complicated lifecycle.

This has been described by some as a form of "temporary insanity" because it is only in effect at certain times. None of the known infection-based neuroses or psychoses in humans appear to have this trait, but it isn't difficult to imagine such. The exercise is even easier if combined with a scenario in which humans are not a part of the natural lifecycle. Perhaps the offending microbe causes auditory hallucinations in response to elevated stress levels in its host, induces shyness with decreased light exposure, causes claustrophobia in very humid environments, or generates a thirty-minute berserker rage about every nine days. With humans being a dead-end host, none of the effects have to make sense from a transmission point of view, so have some fun with it.

Putting It All Together

Emergence

The message from the Teras IV planetary survey team requesting emergency assistance was short and uninformative, but no further communication was forthcoming. *BTS Queguy* made it back to Teras IV in a record 43 hours and sent down a second team. The base camp was in shambles and most of the initial team members were in varying states of decomposition. The single survivor was so paranoid about the new team that he finally had to be tranquilized before he could be brought onboard the landing shuttle. After quickly collecting what other equipment and samples were salvageable, the shuttle returned to the *BTS Queguy*.

The message from the *BTS Queguy* requesting emergency assistance was short and uninformative, but no further communication was forthcoming . . .

The cause of all this trouble is a previously unknown protozoan-like organism. It reproduces sexually in the intestinal lining of the carnivorous tachern, then breaks out of those cells and enters the intestine where it forms cysts. These cysts are expelled and contaminate flora that is then consumed by a small furry critter known simply as a bleet. In the bleet the cysts open in the intestinal tract and invade first the lining, then the blood stream where some live openly in an amoeboid form and others again form cysts. When the infected bleet is eaten by a tachern the cysts break open in the intestine and invade the lining, starting the cycle over again. Cysts in dried bleet blood can be aerosolized, but inhaling these cysts will not cause infection unless they are then coughed up and swallowed.

This infection treats humans as if they were bleets, though with an added complication. Human blood vessels are nowhere near as hardy as those of a bleet, and so they weaken under the chemical onslaught of the organisms in the blood. Anyone who is infected will bruise more easily than normal, will have bloody splotches in their eyes, and, eventually, will start having constant nosebleeds. It is this last symptom that is the most worrying because it is then that the amoeboid organisms in the blood have the chance to burrow along the olfactory nerve. This will disrupt the victim's sense of smell and will allow the organism to reach the brain. Once it hits the all-important gray matter its chemical byproducts will begin inducing aggressive paranoia and eventually insanity. Over time the infected individual will grow suspicious of everyone, will begin attacking and killing anyone he believes is dangerous to him, and will slowly descend into animalistic madness.

For use in other settings, this previously unknown disease can hit a remote village, an underground bunker, or even an ocean-going vessel. It just needs somewhere isolated . . .

Adventure Seeds

- A response team will need to be dispatched immediately for the *BTS Queguy*. A single survivor is waiting for them.
- Any survivors from the *BTS Queguy* have fled the ship in escape pods or by using the landing shuttle. The response team will be able to put together most of what took place by going through what remains onboard, but then the hunt will be on. All of the survivors are infected and they are headed for major population areas. They must be captured before a) they have the chance to lash out at unsuspecting victims, and b) they transmit the disease.

The Power Within

The medicine men of the Laatsii tribes know that they are the Chosen of the spider-goddess Mizinti because of the visions She delivers unto them. The visions are not frequent, but they are taxing. A medicine man in the grip of such a vision will be feverish and will not recognize anyone or anything around him. He will only know Her Word. Vision-states rarely last longer than four hours, and provided the recipient survives the process he will start to recover almost immediately, though time to full recovery will vary depending on the overall health of the man.

Each tribe has one medicine man; each medicine man has one apprentice. After many years of training the apprentice faces the final trial before becoming a medicine man in his own right: the Mark of Mizinti. Once the apprentice has prepared himself, his master tattoos the image of a spider on the back of his neck. This tattoo is colored by both the master's fresh blood and the dust of the red earth. After the tattoo is complete the apprentice enters the sacred circles and begins his vigil. If he is accepted by Mizinti, he will feel Her Touch during the night and soon afterward will receive his first vision. If he is not accepted he will be exiled from his tribe come morning.

Microbe



The visions -- and the associated vision-states -- are actually the gifts of a parasite, not a goddess. Humans are not part of the normal lifecycle, but human-to-human transmission is possible if infected blood enters the bloodstream of a new host. Several of the taboos surrounding the medicine men of the Laatsii exist to prevent someone from "stealing" the powers of the men. They also circumvent most of the possibilities for transmission. The two commandments that most obviously accomplish this are:

- No one may touch the skin or blood of a medicine man -- these things are sacred to Mizinti.
- A medicine man must remain celibate, for he is considered to be a consort of Mizinti and She does not share Her mates.

When an apprentice is tattooed, the infected blood of his master enters his system. Within three hours a fever appears, and less than an hour later the apprentice will be delirious. Future spikes of infestation leading to the fever and delirium can be brought on by reduced immune system capability. This tends to mean that younger medicine men receive fewer visions than the elders.

Adventure Seeds

- During a raid on the tribe's village, an attacker's sword first cuts down the medicine man, then immediately slices into one of the village defenders. Both manage to survive, but the defender has been infected. Anyone stealing power from a medicine man is normally put to death, but as the defender was blameless in the breaking of the taboo it is decided that he will be allowed exile instead. Now on his own, he is trying to make sense of his gift and to follow the wishes of his goddess. He will need stalwart companions to assist him on his journey and guard him when Mizinti delivers Her visions.
 - Rather than being one of the tribe's warriors, the defender may be a member of a military detachment

from a more advanced country that was placed here to help defend the tribes from the genocide being conducted by their government.

- An enemy of the Laatsii wishes the power of Mizinti for himself, and has pieced enough together that he is certain the secret to that power is in the blood of the medicine men. Getting a sample of that blood will not be easy, however, so he is looking to hire a group willing to undertake the mission.
 - Note that only fresh blood can pass along the infection. The parasites will quickly die after being removed from their host.

Know Your Enemy

The Empire had fought a running battle with the Southern Isles for over thirty years. Time and again they assaulted the Isles and time and again they were sent away, licking their wounds, but the ore-rich lands were too valuable to write off. At long last a plan was concocted that would deliver the Isles into the hands of the Emperor. It would begin with an offer of peace and would take over five years to come to fruition . . .

Emperor Songtan III has declared a truce with the Southern Isles, ending decades of war. As symbolic recompense for past violence he has gifted the people of the Isles with over 1000 pigs, a traditional favorite. Unbeknownst to those people, however, is that these pigs are all infected with a tapeworm. Not only will this parasite quickly spread to all of the other pigs on the Isles, it will also spread to the humans. Even worse, once in the humans its larval stage can end up in the brain. There it will form a cyst that, in roughly four years, will be the cause of epilepsy and psychosis. With the population of the Isles in shambles, the forces of the Empire will at long last be able to take over.

(For more details on how something like this would work, see the link regarding Indonesia's introduction of infected pigs into West Papua, below.)

Adventure Seeds

- The Emperor's gift of pigs has yet to be delivered, but there are rumors about it for those who know how and where to listen. Resourceful adventurers may be able to head the attempted biological warfare off before it starts, but care will need to be taken as the people of the Isles may not understand the science behind the treachery and they could very well take offense at anyone trying to spoil this overture of peace. The Emperor, of course, would be most certainly displeased if anything took place to disrupt his plans.
- Nearly five years have passed since the Emperor's gift was delivered and the infection has taken root. It is obvious to anyone who knows what to look for that this was the plan all along; it is only a matter of time before the Imperial forces arrive. The people of the Isles will need strong defenders to aid them in upcoming battle . . . and to avenge them should they fall.

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More Questions than Answers

Pleased to Meet You

by Heather Barnhorst

I have just been informed that I am the new columnist for the retailer *Pyramid* column. Editor Marsh has made me audition by submitting some of my previous writing for review and I am feeling pretty good about the entire process. I congratulate myself and then the doubts set in: double whammy right between the eyes. As I stand behind the front counter at the store, the Universe's largest anxiety attack, no longer free-roaming, makes its visitation upon me. I have no idea what I could write about that might interest the readers of *Pyramid*. I already write a column for what is a business-to-business publication and finding subject matter for that endeavor has never been terribly difficult. Using arcane and obscure business language targeted toward other businesspeople, I can cover a multitude of sins in terms of content; besides, if I find myself truly stuck, I can always write about inventory issues. As long as I keep it informative and well written, I'm left alone to do my own thing. I wonder if I can make the switch from writing about the industry for retailers to writing about it for gamers. And do that every month. I suspect that gamers are more critical. I sense a complete lack of an opportunity to scam my way through a column. I can't think of single sentence to write.

A red flush runs down my arms and legs and my vision turns black around the edges with lots of sparkly bits in the middle to keep the experience aesthetically pleasing. I hyperventilate, which might explain the rushing in my ears. It's the type of anxiety attack that you might have during finals week in college. The type that you might have when you've been sick and you've skipped the last class before the final in favor of staying home and enjoying the privacy of your own bathroom. You know all the questions because in the last class you attended, the professor reviewed the entire semester's material. Besides, you've probably over-studied like you normally do and you've probably even made notes on 3×5 index cards and its Comparative Religions where the professor stated that all the questions are multiple answers, fill in the blanks, and short essays. "Piece of cake," you might think until you walk into the classroom and every other student has his textbook with him and everyone is pulling out blue books (Do they still have these in college?). There are three essay questions written on the blackboard. When you ask what is going on, you are told that the professor changed the format of the test in the last class and that he showed a film so that he could ask an essay question making you compare that film to one that the class saw at the beginning of the semester. By the way, you are informed that the essays are open book. You, of course, didn't bring your textbook because you had already made those handy little note cards. So you sit there for about 10 minutes experiencing a complete brain seizure. You might think that you were completely screwed and I would have to agree with you. (For those of you wondering, I am forced to admit that I did have this experience in college and I can assure you, lest you are experiencing some anxiety from not knowing the end of the story, that I pulled an "A" out of the final.).

That is how intimidated I am by this new opportunity. Writing a column is often an unnerving exercise for me anyway. I often feel that producing a column is a bit like taking a shower and then not being able to find a towel when the doorbell rings in the middle of it. People are always seeing you at your most vulnerable. Sometimes I find I can keep the towel on if the subject matter isn't particularly personal but writing for the *Pyramid* audience is a completely different undertaking. I have to keep it honest and I have to write about games as well as game retailing. So no towels.

An explanatory digression: Here's a typical Monday for me. I wake up a little earlier than normal because today I have a breakfast meeting with the other managers of Attactix. That's the game store that I co-manage. I fire up the computer and answer e-mail, maybe even sneak in a few minutes of IMing with some industry friends. After the meeting, I head over to the store and do my ordering for the week. That is about a five-hour process, but during that time I still need to man the front counter and help our customers. Sometimes I arrive home in time for dinner but on this particular Monday I'm scheduled to close so that I wander into the house just in time to crank out some game reviews or put the finishing touches on one of my columns. There might be some seminar notes that I need to send off to the trade show organizers. Then it is bed time and up again the next day to do it all over again. Don't get me wrong; I love what I do. I enjoy deadlines and I like to work under pressure and I wouldn't do any of it if I didn't want to. That isn't what I would

complain about if I had to complain about anything, but if you notice anything, please notice that I never once mentioned playing a game. And that's important.

Here's a dirty secret -- the more a person works within the game industry, the less likely it is that he will have time to play games, which is where the irony of a game retailer's existence lies. Playing games brought us into this industry where we often find it difficult to make time to play games. Most of us are hardly making a living wage running a game store. We do it for the love of games and because we like their customers. Very often, we find ourselves volunteering to organize game conventions or we get tapped to write game reviews or we sit on publisher panels to help improve product before it hits store shelves. If we aren't careful, we find that we have stopped playing games because games have become work. That's a huge point that everyone should understand.

So let's head back to the counter where, if you will recall, I am in the midst of a major -- albeit silent -- meltdown. Blood has returned to my brain and what I am thinking is that I cannot possibly write anything comparable to the outpourings of the inimitable Mr. Aylott, who is not only a brilliant writer and a gaming genius but a good friend. That's when I look across the counter. There my son, Alex, is standing holding a Brain Bug from the **Starship Troopers** miniature game in his hands. He's a fanatic about the game and he shows real excitement at the prospect of putting together and painting the models. . . . no small feat for this child. He has been saving his allowance and even done some extra chores at home so that he can put together the army he wants to play. Just at this moment he has torn off the shrinkwrap and opened the box, and he is carefully fitting the pieces together and talking about how this particular model is an integral part of his army. I'm not going to bore anyone with the cliché of childhood delight but I'll just remind you of the moment that you cracked open your first RPG or pulled out the rules for that strange-looking board game that you found at a garage sale. The worlds of wonder they opened for you.

I have seen that look on other gamers' faces before. I see that joy every day -- it is why I keep coming back to work. I am not exaggerating when I say that it is my customers' love of gaming and the fun I have in finding the right game for the right customer that makes the job for me. When a customer comes running in and asks, "Is it here, yet?" and I can tell him that the game has indeed arrived, then my life at the store is at its best. Yet when a customer comes to the store and says, "When I win the lottery, I want a store just like this one," I don't congratulate him on his fine sense of priorities. Instead I reply, "Do you love games? Do you want games to become your work? Because being a retailer means looking at games like they are a carton of eggs and figuring out how to sell them." There is a disconnect between these two situations. Thinking about games at the retailer level makes a game store just another type of game-delivery system. That's the contradiction in what a game retailer does. In order to be successful, he must immerse himself into the business part of selling games, but by doing so he makes games into work and most people aren't willing to work at playing games.

But my son's enchantment reminded me of another incident as well. I remember the time that a friend helped my husband and me with a game auction at our local convention. He is co-owner of one of the largest game collections in the country and he is a big man. Yet, when he picked up a game and opened it to make sure that it was complete before putting it up for auction, the love that was in his hands was palpable. He wasn't just looking at the game but he was touching it and inhaling it.

I've loved games as long as I can remember. I am not just talking *Candyland* or *Clue* (although I now collect *Clue* games). I am thinking about the first real board game that I ever played. That would be **1829**, which makes me a train gamer. Or the first roleplaying games that I played. That would be **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** and the **Fantasy Trip**. Add roleplayer to my resume. Or **Empire IV**, a Napoleonic miniature wargaming set and you know what that makes me. How about the first version of **Warhammer 40,000**? I remember those sessions too. When I was 18 (only a few years ago), I became involved with the International Fantasy Gaming Society. To my shame, my very first role was as a wood nymph. It was January. I came down with hypothermia so when online roleplaying in the form of **Everquest** opened its Pandora's Box, I was one of the first to hop on board. I've occasionally been known to play a CCG. Poorly, I might add. I play games which makes me a gamer. I am also a retailer, a reviewer, a columnist. I've even been a convention manager at various times in my life.

Writing a column is more than typing a group of words into a computer. I require that the process be about more than just that. I like to learn as much from my petite rants as anyone who might be reading them. Looking into my son's

face I understand what I will discover from writing this column. While I am busy relating to you stories from the edge of retailing, I can also talk about games just as games again. Every month I will be stalking the shelves and thinking about what you want to read.

I can reconnect with what I was before I made games my profession -- a gamer. That's the gift that you will be giving me, and I can't wait to begin.

Pyramid Pick

Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay

Published by [Black Industries](#)

Developed by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Chris Pramas with Dan Abnett, Jeremy Crawford, Graeme Davis, Kate Flack, Ewan Lamont, Aaron Loeb, T.S. Luikart, Todd Miller, Rick Priestly, Robert J. Schwalb, & Gav Thorpe

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Cartography by Shawn Brown, Nuala Kennedy, & Fluid Entertainment

258-page Full Color Hardback; \$39.99

Rejoice, for the number one British RPG is back in print. Verily, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* is available once again, and in a shiny new second edition. Not bad for a game that is 19 years old. How many younger games have had *more* editions? Originally published in 1986, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* grew out of the miniatures game that eventually became *Warhammer Fantasy Battles*. After Games Workshop dropped roleplaying to concentrate on miniatures, the game found a home at Hogshead Publishing. But *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* returned to Games Workshop in 2000 after Hogshead closed its doors. To the surprise of many, the new version is actually published by Games Workshop through Black Industries, a subsidiary of the Black Library. Another surprise is that the second edition has not been developed by Games Workshop, but by Green Ronin Publishing, the *d20 System* publisher better known for [Mutants & Masterminds](#), [Freeport](#), [City of Adventure](#), and [Mythic Vistas](#) line.

The first thing you need to know is that *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* is *not* for the *d20 System*.

The second is that the new edition of *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* is still the old game, but very much with the rules tweaked and reworked for ease of use. The setting remains the same: the Old World, focusing upon the Empire and its surrounding nations. The feel and look is that of 15th- and 16th-century Europe, with the Empire corresponding to the Holy Roman Empire, the other nations to France, Russia, and so on. The Empire is threatened by the forces of Chaos, both directly and in secret. Indeed, the Empire has only just seen off a massive chaos incursion known as the "Storm of Chaos," leaving it in a perilous state, but trying to recover. This is reflected in Dan Abnett's opening fiction.

Like the first edition, **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** still possesses both a Moorcockian influenced cosmology and a Cthulhoid patina, the major background change being that Emperor Karl Franz is still alive (having previously died in **The Enemy Within** campaign), thus aligning it with **Warhammer Fantasy Battles**, and moving the time frame on 20 years to 2522.

Characters in **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** are still Dwarves, Elves, Halflings, or Humans. The same system of careers is used to handle skill acquisition and character advancement, easily one of **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay's** best features. But they have been given a radical overhaul to make them more balanced and provide more choice. No longer do characters begin with just the one skill, and the choices mean that one entertainer can be different from another. Classic careers such as the Rat Catcher and Bounty Hunter are still here, but there are new ones -- the Kislevite Kossar, the Bone Picker, the Camp Follower, the Elven Kithband Warrior, and others. The new careers reflect the grim and grubby nature of the Old World, but others take in characters from outside the Empire broadening the game's scope. A character starts out with a Basic Career, for example a religious zealot, who might go on to be an Agitator, an Initiate, Flagellant, Friar or Outlaw, and though circumstances and chance rise to become a Politician.

Character generation is easy and quick, and is mostly unchanged. One major change is the dropping of the six-sided die in favor of just the 10-sided and the percentile die. To reflect this, characters have more wounds, and a single d10 is rolled for damage in combat, with modifiers for weapon and strength bonuses much like **DragonQuest**. Attributes have been separated into primary, measured in percentiles, and the secondary as single values. Attributes increase as characters progress through careers, buying advancements that add 5% (or +1) each time. Previously the increase would have been in 10% increments, but the decrease slows down character advancement.

Where the first edition had skills, the second edition has skills and talents, the latter being a mixture of the innate (Lightning Reflexes or Warrior Born) and taught (Specialist Weapon Group [Flail] or Arcane Lore) abilities. Dwarves and Elves begin with set talents, while Halflings and Humans roll for extra. Skills still work by rolling under the appropriate attribute, but now skills can be improved to give an actual bonus. Two extra levels of Skill Mastery can be taken over time to give a 20% bonus. While talents sound like the **d20 System's** feats, **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** is devoid of the feat path phenomenon that can restrictively define a character.

Combat remains little changed, being still quick and deadly. The combat actions are explained well, and their division into Half and Full Actions gives the players easily grasped options and the game a more tactical edge. For example, does a character make a single attack and then enter a parrying stance (both Half Actions) or make multiple attacks in a Full Action Swift Attack? The combat examples do not escape the fact that Games Workshops want you to buy miniatures for the game, but this is the nearest that **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** gets to a hard sell. Damage and Critical hits still work the same, being just as nasty, critical hits more so, as each time a character takes a critical hit, he also gains an Insanity Point!

Fate Points also remain, but to emphasize the fact that their use is intended only when certain death is involved, characters also have Fortune Points. Unlike Fate Points, Fortune Points are refreshed daily and add a certain degree of luck to a character's life, such as re-rolling a skill test, or gaining an extra parry, dodge, or half action in combat. Dropped, however, are the rules for alignment, but in the first edition these only reflected the extremes of each.

The most radically overhauled aspect of **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** is its magic system. The old one was clunky, flavorless, and a stopgap measure until something better turned up. Both arcane and divine magic use the same mechanics which are radically different to the game's percentile system. Each spell caster has a new secondary attribute, Magic, rated from one to four. This value represents the dice pool of 10-sided dice to roll and add whenever a spell is cast. If the result is equal to or greater than the spell's casting number, then the attempt is successful. This can be as simple as casting number 3 for *Glowing Light* or as high as 31 for *Conflagration of Doom*. Using correct ingredients can modify the roll, and spellcasters can choose to roll fewer dice for the less powerful spells . . . and for a very good reason. Every time a caster rolls multiple dice, he attracts Tzeentch's Curse, which forces the player to roll on the Chaos Manifestation Tables! This can result in the caster's hair standing on end for 10 minutes or suffering Daemonic Possession for a minute, or being Called to the Void and sucked into the Realm of Chaos, never to be seen again!

Likewise, when a divine spell caster rolls multiples, he suffers the Wrath of the Gods. This isn't quite as severe as Tzeentch's Curse, but then divine spells are less powerful. As part of the overhaul, magic, now the manipulation of raw chaos, has been reorganized to bring it into line with **Warhammer Fantasy Battles**. Thus there are eight Orders of Magic, each with an associated college, lore, and color. Magic is classified into various types -- Petty, Lesser and various Lores -- and a character must have the appropriate talent to learn and use spells for each type. One major addition is the new career Hedge Wizard, representing the self-taught amateur spell caster, possibly as white witch or village healer. Unfortunately, the Hedge Wizard's magic is unregulated and thus illegal in the Empire. Most Hedge Wizards become apprentice wizards or end up persecuted by Witch Hunters.

In terms of background there is information on the various gods and faiths of the Old World, as well as a decent introduction to the Empire. This describes its politics and geography as well as the threats it faces. Many of these threats like the rat-like Skaven and the Vampire Counts again tie back into **Warhammer Fantasy Battles**, but **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay's** traditional threat of Chaos-worshipping cults and societies are also included. Long time devotees may decry the lack of background, but it is just enough to get started and obviously, it leaves plenty of room for expansion and sourcebooks. Other sections also help enforce the grim and gritty feel of the setting, including descriptions of religious days and observances, and a wonderful list of false limbs and prosthetics.

Advice for the GM is pleasingly specific to the game, covering the GM's job, running adventures and campaigns, and dealing with both the game's magic and mechanics. The accompanying bestiary is short but adequate in the short term, and includes several templates to reflect a creature's different status and occupation. The basic starting adventure, "Through the Drakwald" takes place in the aftermath of the "Storm of Chaos," when Chaos Beastmen nearly took the strategically important river crossing at Untergard, but even as the villagers pick themselves up and try to rebuild, another attack is made! Continued defense of Untergard looks impossible, so an evacuation to the safety of the nearby city of Middenheim is called for. The player characters are asked to accompany the refugee convoy to the city. This is a reasonable adventure, though older fans will find it a little basic. Yet, it serves as a decent introduction and sets everything up ready for **Paths of the Damned Volume 1: Ashes of Middenheim**, the first part of a new campaign trilogy. In terms of presentation **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** is well done, but the artwork is rarely evocative. Though not typographically perfect, the writing is never less than clear and easy to read. Indeed, everything is so nicely explained that, in combination with overall simplicity of the mechanics, serves to make the new edition of **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** a *good* introductory RPG . . . much more so than the current version of **Dungeons & Dragons**.

In **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** long-time fans will find the game they know and love, but with small but necessary additions and rewrites that fix many of the original's problems. The primary three are the better-balanced careers, the excising of the "Naked Dwarf Syndrome" (dwarves with an excessive toughness attribute such that armor is unnecessary) by reducing toughness advancements and making armor better, and providing a much better magic system. In fact the new magic system is simple, elegant and dangerous, cleverly doing away with magic points and allowing wizards to cast freely, but with the danger of Chaos Manifestation. The realigning of **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** with **Warhammer Fantasy Battles** also opens the RPG up to a potentially very large market.

It is clear that **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** is very much a labor of love for both its writers and Green Ronin Publishing, and proof that they can do more than the **d20 System** (which they do well). **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** heralds a triumphant return to the roleplaying hobby for Games Workshop and is a worthy pretender to **Dungeon & Dragon's** fantasy crown.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Pyrrmaid Review

Oceania

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

Design by Klaus Teuber

Illustrated by Bernd Wagenfeld

Graphics by Pohl & Rick

Rulebook, mounted fold-out board, 16 Scout tiles, 60 playing tiles, & wooden ship pawn, full color, one or two players; \$15.00

In the midst of the overwhelming number of pricey European games on the market, it's nice when a fairly inexpensive item like *Carcassonne* comes out. If you look at *Oceania*, though, you'll see that Mayfair Games, Inc. offers an even lower-priced alternative. With a savings of time, money, and size, this item has charms all its own.

The object of the game is to score the most points for your explorations.

Oceania is a large, uncharted area depicted on the board. The players are the intrepid explorers who start at the more familiar edges and begin doing what any good adventurer does -- whittling away at things until they've got the whole area mapped. Oceania is revealed as Sea Tiles are drawn at random from the pile. Players take turns placing the Explorer Ship on a chosen starting space, drawing a tile, then finding a way to make that piece fit.

There are land masses, the sea, and white dotted lines to which the active player must pay heed. The lines connect the distant lands to the points of origin -- they're sort of the "shipping lanes" in this new world, and you have to maintain that trail of bread crumbs. The different configurations of tiles means you'll have to choose where to fit something, if you can fit it in at all. Tiles that don't fit are placed in front of you, and if you don't find a place to play it before the game is called, your total is penalized. You can play it on a later turn, but you have to "spend" one of your Scouts to do it . . . he's out of the game, and your exploratory forces are thereby depleted.

After you've placed the tile, you can drop a Scout on one of the landmasses you've created. The more explorers you have in a place, the better the chance you'll control that island at the end of the game. Any time an empty square is surrounded on all four sides, it automatically gets filled in using one of the Reserve Tiles. Reserves are distributed nicely, so it's pretty much a guarantee you can fill in any hole using one of them. If you have the most Scouts on an island, you get a point for every tile that makes up that piece of land. If your opponent landed an equal number of people there during the game, neither of you get the points. Only completed islands are scored; if there are holes, you get nothing (the Reserve Tiles are only used if the hole is one space -- multiple missing tiles can't be filled in this way).

The pieces, like the game, are brief and to the point. The board is small but useful, the tiles only as big as they need to be to get hold of, and the Scout chips small and unobtrusive. The Oceania shown on the board (before players cover it with bright blue tiles) is all done in sepia tones, suggesting old maps in the best "Here there be dragons" style. It all fits into a box about the size of a small hardback book.

Let's go ahead and get those comparisons to the popular *Carcassonne* game series out of the way. It certainly shares much in common with that form of game play -- tiles have to match to fit, ownership is established with Scout tokens,

and so on. That said, the board limits play, and you're not at all guaranteed of finding a good place for your tile. Having to balance the loss of your point-gaining Scouts with the potential for them to secure your lands is another neat twist, and you have to be more methodical because you lock yourself into where you're going to play at the beginning of each turn. It's a bit of a shame this process is called picking a "starting point" -- such a misnomer is only one of a few strange bits in the rules that the reader has to puzzle out.

But ***Oceania*** is a quick game -- you can finish it in just a few minutes, and play several rounds in an evening. It's small enough to carry and set up just about anywhere, and the compact rules offer enough tiny twists to hold your attention. Not that ***Carcassonne*** is a wallet-buster, but the price is right for this set as well, especially if the usual cost of these games sends you running. Comparisons notwithstanding, this one is well worth investigating.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Jumping Off a Cliff's Notes

*"I took a speed reading course and read **War & Peace** in 20 minutes. It's about Russia."*
-- Woody Allen

Over the course of helping to plot out various RPG books for my Day Job, we were debating about whether or not a certain amount of space was enough for a certain subject. "Well, gee," the Powers That Be would ask, "Is a 32-page PDF supplement enough room to detail to a new space-opera world?"

Now, having edited *Pyramid* since dice first crawled out of the primordial ooze, I always find this wildly amusing. See, I'm used to writers squeezing in entire campaigns in a 5,000-word article, which is the equivalent of about a six-page book. But this struggle to come up with an appropriate length hits at the heart of one of the greatest paradoxes of the gaming world: Namely, that fans want (or think they want) a richly detailed world, but more material that exists for a game usually translates into a greater difficulty in attracting new fans. After all, who wants to read 200 books before starting a campaign?

Hamlet commented that he could be confined to a nutshell and consider himself king of infinite space. (He then goes on to babble about dreams, but that's another column.) In many ways, roleplaying games have the same luxury. After all, a campaign can span the universe (or even infinite universes!), or they might be tightly focussed to a single city, island, or even office building. While there's no limit on how grandiose a campaign can get, there probably isn't much limit as to how tightly focused or narrow an RPG can get, either. (Trivia time: What two movies had every member of the cast nominated for an Oscar?)

Of course, the larger in scope a game gets, the easier it is for GMs to slip their own material "into the cracks." After all, if Mars is only given a footnote's worth of informational detail, then whatever the GM makes up is likely to be "right." And in a large enough setting, it's trivial to avoid repercussions by never mentioning or revisiting an area again.

In some ways, I suspect this is the appeal of wandering campaigns -- those that spend a little bit of time in each place before moving on. This is the structure of the typical fantasy campaign (roaming from town to town, dungeon to dungeon), countless television action shows (wandering the Earth like Kane from *Kung Fu*, or Dr. Richard Kimble from *The Fugitive*), and many sci-fi/space opera settings ("Captain's Log: We're orbiting another magnificent, mysterious planet that we'll never mention again after this week . . ."). And the nice thing about this format is that, in a brief enough dose, just about anything can be interesting for one story. The danger is in trying to revisit places that existed primarily as "idea worlds" -- really, once the players have visited a world where they relive the same day over and over, there isn't much reason to go back. Consider that half of the *Star Wars* movies had a significant part of their action taking place on Tatooine . . . a desert planet that, it seemed, wasn't all that interesting in the first place. Really, it mostly existed in *A New Hope* to show what a boring ball of dirt it was, setting the stage for the heroes to get the heck away from it.

Of course, this doesn't explain what to do about those places which are designed to be revisited, or those places with lots of interesting bits on one world. How do you handle loads of different places, and make them richly detailed (or potentially so) without forcing the GM to read through reams of material?

The way I feel information might be best handled in an RPG setting strikes me as obvious, but I haven't ever seen it done in a commercial product or series. Namely, whatever is "obvious" needs to be stated up front, as briefly but thoroughly as possible. Whether a book discusses a world, a city, a building, or something smaller, I think it would be useful to list the most obvious features of that place, as quickly as possible.

For example, if I was discussing my old stomping ground of Tallahassee, I would probably mention the following:

Tallahassee

- Amalgam of large state college (fixated on football) and seat of state government, resulting in large "seasonal" population
- Large, phallus-shaped structure in the city's center is the state capitol building, one of the largest and most distinctive buildings
- Wildly hot and humid summers, moderate other seasons (jacket at most), with a few cold days in the winter

Any adventure I would set there would probably incorporate one of these three facts in some fashion. If the players left Tallahassee for a few months and then returned, I would make sure they were reminded of those facts.

Or, getting back to Tatooine:

Tatooine

- Desert world -- sand everywhere, with only occasional rock structures breaking up the monotony
- Sparsely populated; easy to get (and stay) lost, and survival is challenging
- Desperate world, controlled by criminal and fringe elements

Almost any other fact about the place -- the economics of moisture farming, the unusual celestial bodies, whether they race chariots . . . er, *pods*, -- are second fiddle to those facts.

(A GM could have a "secondary" tier of information that is crucial but might not be obvious, or is obvious but might not be crucial (for example, the fact that a city is windy, or the fact that for one week a year the entire town shuts down for religious reasons).

If all information about a setting is presented in this way, then the amount of information a gamemaster needs to assimilate -- or reassimilate -- becomes significantly less. For example, suppose a GM uses three pieces of information for each level of information. If an adventure takes place in an unusual house in a city on an alternate world, then the GM may only need to reacquaint himself -- and the players -- with nine pieces of information ("Okay; this is the world with giant-robot-wielding Victorian Nazis. This city is a new techno-haven, having been rebuilt after a fire a few years ago. The building pivots to face the sun, akin to a sundial. Everyone on the same page?")

Of course, for this to be the case, writers and creators need to have the focus to know what is important about a world . . . and, in the case of a professionally published game world, the GM would need to agree with the authors about what's important about a place. But as a starting point and organizational technique, sticking with a few important bits can help digest dozens or hundreds of pages easily . . . leading to more time for fun.

--*Steven Marsh*

Readily Distinguishable From Magic

More Low-Tech Alternate Technologies

by Matt Riggsby

We've already seen [alternate paths](#) to technologies like steel, gunpowder, and telescopes. But there is a vast number of other technologies, each of which could have come about in a different way than it did historically. In this article, we'll be looking into less probable and less fundamental technologies which could have a subtle effect on your campaign world or provide world-hoppers with much-needed resources. If you ever wanted to have airborne PCs dropping propaganda leaflets on their enemies while listening to a battery-powered Victrola (and who hasn't?), this one's for you.

Aircraft

Just as the advances necessary to achieve steam power would inexorably make a society TL5, the advances necessary to achieve powered flight would make a society TL6. Unpowered flight, though, might be a different matter. Like gunpowder and steam engines, early experiments are likely to kill the experimenters, but it's not implausible to get people at low TLs into the air.

Hot-air balloons, which historically appeared in the early decades of TL5, require a heat source and a reasonably heat-resistant and gas-tight envelope. It doesn't have to be perfectly airtight, but the longer it can contain hot air, the better. Many societies are likely to have access to tightly woven fabrics or paper and paper-like materials such as papyrus suitable to contain hot air long and well enough to make brief flights possible. Paper may actually be an important component in the evolution of balloons. Hot air was used to launch lighter-than-air paper toys in TL3 China and TL4/5 Europe; the first hot-air balloons, launched by the Montgolfier brothers, sons of a paper manufacturer, combined layers of finely woven cloth and paper. The important bit of physical science (that hot gases rise and therefore an envelope filled with hot gasses may be able to lift a payload) was known as early as the early third century BC, around the middle of TL2, making the independent invention of hot-air ballooning a theoretical possibility at that point.

It's even vaguely possible that it could have been invented earlier. Experimental evidence indicates that balloons were a physical possibility as early as TL1. One puzzle about the Nazca lines of Peru is that their shapes, representing various animals and other figures, can only really be seen from the air. The question, of course, is why so much effort was put into making something the makers couldn't actually see. Theories range from the reasonable but unsubstantiated (they're intended for spirits or deities presumed to be viewing from the sky) to the patently absurd (they're landing strips for aliens). One theory just at the border of plausibility is that they were, in fact, viewed from the air by lucky humans. A group of archeologists, working with materials known to be available to the makers of the lines, managed to construct a hot air balloon which took two people to an altitude of over 40 meters and safely down again. However, even if Peruvian balloons existed (the archaeologists acknowledge that despite their experiments with available materials there's no evidence that it was actually done), it's unlikely that such an invention would be based on scientific principle that early. It might require the intervention of time travelers or someone working with a fanciful theory that captured smoke might make things fly (which, actually, appears to be something like the theory that the Montgolfier brothers were working with). The first TL5 flights easily reached 100 meters, and it's not unlikely that TL2-4 balloons made from appropriate materials (say, paper-lined silk) could reach similar heights.

An obstacle to *useful* early ballooning is the duration of the flight. The Nazca experiment and the early TL5 balloons left their heat source on the ground. The balloon would be placed over some kind of furnace or bonfire which would fill the envelope with hot air and smoke, allowing the balloon to rise. Once it had lifted off, the balloon would stay up for a bare few minutes until the air in it cooled and it sank again. To have more than a quick up-and-down flight, a balloon needs to carry its own fire. TL4- societies don't have the luxury of pressurized propane tanks and burners, so they have to carry fast-burning combustibles such as straw and finely-chopped kindling (charcoal may produce more

heat per pound, but it lights and burns far too slowly to be useful for these purposes) to keep up the temperature inside the envelope. This is rather dangerous, since the materials making up the envelope are inevitably flammable at low TLs, and because of limits on payload and the amount of fuel a balloon can carry, an on-board heat source apparently still can't push the maximum duration of a flight past a half hour.

There's another option for long balloon flights, but it's not much help for low-tech aeronauts. In our history, hydrogen balloons replaced hot-air balloons after a few decades (hot-air balloons only became popular again in the 1960s with the invention of durable nylon fabrics), but since that requires sufficient industrial chemistry to produce large quantities of hydrogen, that's not an option until early TL5 anyway.

With little payload and without propulsion, balloons aren't going to be at all useful as transportation. Even for a straight up-and-down route (say, to reach a fortress atop a cliff), other forms of transportation will be far more cost-effective. However, their use as military observation posts was immediately obvious to any number of people; it was one of Benjamin Franklin's first thoughts when he saw a balloon demonstrated in Paris. A sophisticated early civilization might have specialist balloon personnel in its armies just as it would have specialist scouts and siege engineers. Indeed, they'd probably work hand-in-hand, using balloons to find enemy troops, marching routes, defensible positions, and so on. In peacetime, balloons could be used in a similar fashion to survey for roads and building sites. They might also be an aid to navigation. Large ships could carry a small balloon and send it up several times the height of the mast to get a better look at their surroundings to find land from far away or to rise above low-lying fog.

Heavier-than-air craft are problematic. Certainly, there have been experiments through history. The use of large kites to lift men as scouts and battlefield observers has been attested to in China, and there's an account of a Muslim scholar of the ninth century building a partly-successful glider (which may have been little more than a glorified parachute) launched from the top of a tall building. The materials necessary to make gliders, light but sturdy wood and tightly woven cloth, are probably available as early as TL1, as are the raw mechanical skills, in that TL1 craftsmen given plans and lists of materials could build a functional airfoil. However, that's definitely time-traveler territory; experiments by native inventors are likely to be lethal. And even ignoring the difficulty of building an airfoil, practical heavier-than-air craft require compact, powerful propulsion, which is well beyond what any society before TL6 can muster. Gliders could be constructed as expensive toys, but that's the limit.

Electricity

Direct current is very easy to produce. All it takes is an acidic solution (vinegar, or even fruit juices, are sufficient) and two bits of metal. When the metals are put into the acid, a wire between them will carry a current. The whole assembly could have been produced as early as the beginning of TL1. And, in fact, it might have been invented. A set of ceramic jars found in Baghdad dating to mid-late TL2 might have served as wet-cell batteries. However, they wouldn't have been very powerful, with each three-by-six-inch jar providing one to two volts. If, in fact, they were batteries, they might have been used for electroplating or delivering mild shocks (petting electric eels was an exotic therapy for chronic pain relief).

To generate larger amounts of electricity, building an electrical power plant might appear to be a more feasible alternative. Again, the principle is simple: a magnet is rotated inside a coil of wire or a coil of wire is rotated around a magnet. Either gets an electric current going. Given some magnets and a copious supply of wire (for which, see

How Not To Build a Dirigible

Propulsion technologies available at low TLs are unlikely to usefully move a hot-air balloon, but that won't stop people from trying. Rudimentary steam engines of the TL2 glorified kettle variety might be used in hopes of providing rocket propulsion, although anything light enough to get off the ground would be far too weak to provide useful propulsion. TL3 gunpowder rockets could be light enough to leave the ground, but would likewise be too weak to push the balloon around much. However, a balloon with rockets just might be useful as an airborne weapons platform. At a height of 100+ meters, it would be beyond the range of just about any ground-based weapon of the age, and its rockets, though probably painfully inaccurate, might be large enough to do real damage if they happen to hit a target.

below), it wouldn't be terribly difficult to modify a windmill or waterwheel as an electrical generator.

It wouldn't be terribly effective, though. The practical upper limit on the power of early waterwheels, imposed by the physical limitations of the materials available at TL4 and below, appears to be around three or four horsepower, and simple systems to convert mechanical motion into electrical power and vice versa are around 50% efficient. However, with refinement, considerable improvement might be possible. Experiments with turning old mills into micro-power plants in England have indicated that their output might get as high as 5 kw.

The big problem with building any electrical device before TL5 is the lack of theoretical and technological underpinnings. Some electrical and magnetic effects were well-observed through history, but it wasn't until the 17th century that they could be investigated in a concerted way and not until the 19th that the most important advances were achieved. Those developments arose in a context of relatively advanced mathematics, chemistry, metallurgy, and other technologies, making it quite unlikely that they'll arise independently as earlier TLs. It would probably take either time travelers or very lucky mad scientists to build them at TL4-.

Assuming the design is available, the next obstacle is economic. First, at low TLs, wire is very expensive to produce. Second, even if wire can be produced cheaply, the raw material is still prohibitively costly at most low TLs. The cost of the copper needed to construct a hydroelectric plant at TL3 or below would approach a king's ransom, or at least duke's. Through TL4, improved mining and metallurgical technology, largely the consequence of increasing use of water and steam power to pump out mines and process ore, will make it significantly cheaper.

And, finally, there's the problem of practical application. Some of the easier ones include the aforementioned electroplating equipment, lighting (carbon arc lamps are easy to build, but require constant adjustment), electrolysis for chemical experiments, electromagnets (once somebody works out the trick of wrapping a coil of wire around a bit of iron), electric motors (DC motors are easier to build than AC motors, making battery powered toys a likely early invention), and mild shocks (in addition to the aforementioned pain therapy, a metal idol could be wired up, giving someone grasping it a mild but uncanny tingle). Ultimately, though, this is another case where time travelers and the like will get greater benefits than native inventors.

Magnets

Dealing with magnets essentially requires the use of iron, making them at least a TL2 development. And although magnets were known for centuries, it wasn't until TL4 that any significant theoretical work on the topic appeared. It was known that a piece of iron could be made magnetic temporarily by rubbing it with another magnet, but in the 16th century, it was discovered that heating a long piece of iron with its ends pointing north and south would make it mildly but *permanently* magnetic. Although the smiths didn't know it, heating iron to a certain point and then letting it cool inside a magnetic field would cause it to take on that magnetic field. The magnetic field in question here was the earth's own.

Although it's a bit unlikely, it's certainly conceivable that a smith could come up with this technique on his own. For example, a mystically inclined smith might find an occult reason for forging items aligned with points of the compass. An appropriately shaped magnet might then attract small bits of metal, leading the smith to suspect that something was up, or a bit of metal carelessly but luckily dropped in a bucket or puddle might point north for no apparent reason.

With this technique, smiths could at least make compass needles fairly cheaply, which would probably noticeably improve navigation. Moreover, widespread use of magnetic compasses might lead careful observers closer to the poles to more carefully define the difference between magnetic and true north, giving them a crude means of determining latitude. Making stronger magnets, however, relies on other relatively sophisticated electrical technology, which wouldn't be available until TL5.

Other Printing Technologies

Although it's a versatile tool, the printing press isn't the only way to reproduce writing. For example, block printing,

with which there were a variety of experiments in the centuries before the development of movable type, developed long before the printing press. Inscriptions were carved into blocks of wood or metal and used as ink stamps. There are a number of trade-offs in this technology. For example, larger blocks with more type are a more efficient way to print once they've been carved. However, they require, on average, more effort to make than their smaller counterparts; if a carver makes a significant mistake, he'll have to start over, and on a larger block, he may already have expended a great deal of now-lost effort. Metal vs. wood is another trade-off; metal takes more work to prepare, while wood doesn't last as long. Block printing also suffers from the same water-based vs. oil-based problems early printing presses would have suffered.

However, there's a little-discussed alternative to "stamping" technologies: wax rubbing. Long a hobbyist practice (usually on gravestones and other monuments; it was practiced early in China's TL 2 and by TL4 in Europe), large but thin sheets of paper or fabric are placed on an inscribed surface and rubbed with crayon-like colored wax. The paper/fabric comes away with an image of the inscribed surface. Assuming the existence of suitable paper or cloth, this would be a very inexpensive way of copying existing inscriptions. Indeed, it may have been; there's some reason to believe that rubbings were used by some Chinese scholars to make their own copies of legal codes and the like.

Rubbing technology could never be as efficient in the long run as moveable type and the printing press, but there could be ways to make it more popular and effective than it was historically. For example, the lighter pressures involved in rubbing as opposed to pressing bring a different material into play: ceramics. Instead of requiring carvers to laboriously gouge bits out of metal and wood blocks, scribes could scrape their writing into thin sheets of clay in the style of Mesopotamian clay tablets, probably held in shallow metal or wooden plates to provide rigidity. In addition to ease of writing, the wet clay would have the considerable advantage of being correctable. If a scribe got a word wrong or even left out a line, he would only have to smear over the error rather than start all over again. Once a plate was finished, it could be smoothed with a string or wire so that the surface would be even then fired until it was hard. The hardened plate could then serve as the model for a great many rubbings.

This technique would, of course, require careful refinement of the clay to prevent it from deforming too much when fired, but any reasonably advanced TL1 society should be able to handle that well enough to produce plates with reasonably sized "type." The crucial technology which might not exist everywhere is a sufficiently fine cloth or paper to take a rubbing. Asia clearly had sufficient materials no later than early TL2; Europe didn't have paper until rather later, but it may well have had sufficiently fine linen or cotton that early, if not earlier. GMs who want to justify widespread literacy and distribution of texts in a pre-Renaissance society might use this method to justify it.

Sound Recording

Early sound recording equipment, developed by Edison and others late in TL5, was equipped with a stylus attached to a vibration-sensitive membrane (one of Alexander Graham Bell's experiments on the mechanical reproduction of sound sensibly, if morbidly, used a human eardrum). The stylus pressed against a soft, moving surface, usually a wax-covered cylinder or disk across which the stylus moved in a spiral path, while the membrane vibrated in sympathy with nearby sounds, causing scratches in the surface, quite literally cutting the record. A similar device was used for playback; a much lighter stylus was moved along the grooves of the recording surface, causing a membrane to vibrate and reproduce the original sound.

It's tempting to think that an advanced TL2 society could have produced such a device. The ancient Greeks and Romans, for example, were in the habit of using wax-covered writing surfaces, they had fairly sophisticated gearing which could have properly guided a stylus assembly over a recording surface, and they had made the critical observation that sound was vibration. Both recording and playback machinery would have to be carefully hand-cranked, since clockwork technology wouldn't be even close to sophisticated enough to regulate the machinery until at least well into TL4, but experimental recording equipment of the 1800s suffered the same limitation.

Reproducing a recording, however, could be an issue. To mass-produce a record, inventors quickly hit on a method of using a wax-covered metal recording surface, which was then treated with acid. The acid etched the grooves into the hard metal. The metal surface could then be used to produce negative masters which would in turn be used to press multiple copies of the recording into a softer medium such as rubber or shellac. Even ignoring issues surrounding an

appropriate medium for pressing records, the appropriate acids probably don't become available until TL3, and even when appropriate chemicals become available, etching technology doesn't develop until the TL3/4 border.

But even though mass-produced recordings are unlikely, individual sound recordings could still become, as they did in our history, a popular entertainment. The initial investment in a player would be considerable, but itinerant record-players could charge considerable sums for coming into a town and playing a few recordings for a paying audience, much as early movies were shown by traveling operators in our history. They could also be a useful propaganda tool. Instead of just having them written down, rulers could record proclamations (in front of a few dozen recorders) and have them circulated among regional governors. Just as rulers made their faces known by putting them on coins, making them a greater presence in everyday lives, they could make their voices known as well.

Suspension Bridges

Rope bridges across rivers and gorges are a fixture in many fantasy campaigns. However, in the **GURPS** TL system, they're anachronistic. The west didn't see bridges based on suspended roadbeds and tension rather than compression on structural members until the 18th century, making them solidly TL5. In Europe, bridges longer than a plank of wood or a sturdy log relied on stone or wooden arches resting on piers touching the ground underneath.

However, much of the rest of the world figured out suspension much earlier. The Chinese were building suspension bridges from bamboo and iron chains as early as the third century BC, fairly early in their TL2. Bridges using just rope and no metal members can be even earlier. The TL1 Inka (albeit a very advanced TL1) used them extensively, and it's not impossible that a late TL0 society could develop them. Although they may look dubious compared to stone arch bridges, early suspension bridges could usually carry any load their builders could put over them. That generally means people and the occasional horse; very heavy carts might be a problem, and anyone wanting to invent railroads had best find another way of building bridges.

The real drawbacks of early suspension bridges are their stability and durability. Before suspension bridges using mostly metal members become possible late in TL4, lightweight rope and even chain bridges are susceptible to vibration and swaying caused by wind and loads passing over them; the longer and lighter the bridge, the greater a problem it is. The raw materials also need to be maintained carefully. The ropes can wear out because of weathering and need to be replaced on a regular basis (annually is sufficient) to keep them safe.

One of the big advantages of early suspension bridges is that they're far less expensive to build than stone and wood bridges. It's not a world-shaking technology, but additional bridging might in some small way make transportation cheaper and easier, reducing dependence on (and feudal fees from) fords and stone bridges.

Wire

Metal wire is a fairly old invention, used in jewelry as far back as TL1. Industrially useful wire, though, didn't come around until much, much later. Early wire wasn't terribly even, and it was produced by painstaking manual techniques, hammering out blocks of metal into thinner and thinner strips or pounding it into a grooved form. Such wire is almost inevitably flat or square, and certainly not round.

Drawing, a method which produces metal which is both more efficient and produces more even wire, only developed in TL4. Drawing requires a very hard metal block with a hole drilled through it, wider on one side than the other (very fine wire is drawn using hard gemstones, which is well beyond the capacity of just about any low-tech society). Another piece of metal to be turned into wire is hammered so that one end will fit all the way through the block and the narrow hole. It is then secured with pliers or clamps and slowly pulled. The metal is dragged through the block, squeezed and stretched into a length of wire. The operation can be repeated through a series of holes of diminishing diameter to produce wire as thin as holes can be drilled for it. Drawn wire can have just about any cross-section so long as it can be drilled: square, round, triangular, etc.

One of the main limitations is that the metal to be drawn can't be harder than the metal of the drawing block. If it is, it

will fairly quickly stretch open the hole in the block rather than be formed into wire. Even softer metals will eventually deform the block, but not nearly so soon. Therefore, copper wire is a reasonable possibility as soon as good iron is available in TL2, although wrought iron drawing blocks will wear out much more quickly than TL4 cast iron blocks. Iron or steel wire of good quality and in reasonable quantities has to wait on considerable developments in metallurgy: TL4 at the very earliest, and probably TL5. Garrotes, therefore, will need to be made from less effective copper and bronze, or more likely from rope (which is cheaper and won't snap from metal fatigue if it gets used too often), until TL4 if not TL5, trip "wires" should probably use thin thread instead of wire, and time travelers will have to introduce fairly advanced metallurgy if they want to build suspension bridges with steel cables.

Making Friends and Conjuring People

Summonable Allies for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Reverend P. Kitty

The ability to summon forth creatures from another time or place has long been a part of fiction, whether it's a necromancer animating shadows, a cultist calling up demonlings from Hell, or a fiery superhero crafting an elemental out of living flames. **GURPS** has traditionally handled this with spells such as Summon Demon, Create Warrior, and so on. But not all campaign settings feature magic (and not all "conjuring" character concepts make sense as wizards.) Fortunately, **GURPS** now offers an alternative: Summonable Allies.

The Summonable enhancement can turn Allies from a standard social advantage into a supernatural power. In fact, it's reasonable for the GM to rule that Allies becomes a [Mental, Supernatural] advantage instead of a [Social] one when used in such a manner. The Minion enhancement is equally appropriate, and since most summoned creatures will have Slave Mentality, it's free! Since a failed Frequency of Appearance roll means that your Allies are unavailable for one full day, it usually makes sense to buy them as Constantly Available (x4 cost) and then apply limitations like Limited Use or Unreliable if you wish to restrict use of the power.

Disposable Sidekicks

"But, gee, Mister Lizard, what happens when you add nitroglycerin to rocket fuel?"

"Well Timmy, why don't you find out while I stand behind this lead shield?"

"Okay!"

[KA-BOOM!]

"We're gonna need another Timmy!"

--Dinosaurs

The downside to using Allies as summonable cannon fodder is that once they're gone, they're gone, and the only way to bring them back is with more character points. That's just no fun. So the simplest solution is to make sure they never die for good. Unkillable makes that possible, while Regeneration (only when dead) makes it convenient.

To help offset the high cost of those advantages, consider some of the drawbacks that summoned creatures typically have. Adding Fragile (Unnatural) will reduce the cost while making bookkeeping easier -- not to mention, if they die at -HP every time, it means less waiting for them to come back to life. It's also thematically appropriate, as are Automaton (p. B263), Dead Broke, and a few Features. To save time and space, these abilities can be wrapped up into a meta-trait:

Conjured Servant: You only exist in our world when summoned here to obey your master. If reduced to -HP, you vanish in a puff of smoke, and can be summoned again within (2×HP) minutes. Regeneration (Fast; Only when dead, -40%) [30]; Unkillable 3 [150]; Automaton [-85]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; Dead Broke [-25]; Neither has nor can spend Fatigue Points (see Machine, p. B263) [0]; and Vanishes when dead [0]. *20 points.*

What Do You Want to Summon Today?

GURPS Campaigns has simplified templates for animals and **GURPS Magic** has templates for the classic elementals, undead, and demons. Just add the Conjured Servant meta-trait and you're ready to buy it as an Ally (or Ally Group). What follows are some additional beings that a summoner may wish to bring forth. Each template includes notes on varying the power level, since Allies are bought as a fraction of their master's value and thus will usually need their point cost adjusted up or down slightly. A worked example of using the creature as an Ally follows each template.

Shadow (100 points)

Attributes: ST 0 [-100]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 8 [-40]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: HP 10 [20]; Per 8 [0]; Will 8 [0]; FP - [0]; Speed 5.00 [0]; Ground Move 5 [0]; Air Move 10 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 10.

Advantages: Alternative Attacks: Fatigue Attack 1d (Cosmic, Irresistable Attack, +300%; Freezing, +20%; Melee Attack, C, -30%) [39] & Toxic Attack 1d (Cosmic, Irresistable Attack, +300%; Melee Attack, C, -30%) [15/5=3]; Conjured Servant [20]; DR 4 (Can't wear armor, -40%) [12]; Flight [40]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Diffuse; No Eyes; No Neck) [110].

Disadvantages: Frightens Animals [-10]; Lifebane [-10]; Mute [-25]; Social Stigma (Monster) [-15]; Vulnerability (Light, ×2) [-20].

Skills: Brawling-15 [16]; Stealth-15 [20].

Notes: Takes maximum of 1 or 2 points of damage from non-area attacks. Killed by 20 points of damage; can be summoned again in 20 minutes. Does 1d damage to either HP or FP of any living being by touch (DR does not protect).

Power Level: To save points, reduce Air Move [-2/level], change Flight to Walk On Air [-20] (Air Move becomes 5), or reduce attack damage to 1d-2 [-24]. To spend points, raise Ground Move [5/level], Air Move [2/level], Basic Speed [20/level] (which will raise both Moves along with Dodge), or attack damage to 1d+1 [+13], 1d+2 [+26], 2d-1 [+31], or 2d [+42].

Worked Example: Shayde wants the ability to animate the shadows of her enemies. She's a 400-point superhero, so each Shadow is 25% of her point total (base cost 1 point). She wants to be able to animate up to 50 of them, in case she's attacked by a mob (x10 normal cost) and she wants them Constantly Available (×4 normal cost). They're Summonable Minions, of course, but she saves some points with an appropriate Accessibility limitation (which limits the number of Shadows she can conjure and also makes her power useless in total darkness) and Costs Fatigue.

Animate Shadows: Allies, 50 Shadows, 25% Power, Constantly Available (Accessibility, Can only summon one Ally for each enemy shadow, -30%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; Minion, +0%; Summonable, +100%) [66]

Poltergeist (150 points)

Attributes: ST 0 [-100]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 6 [-80]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: HP 5 [10]; Per 6 [0]; Will 6 [0]; FP - [0]; Damage 1d+1/2d+2 (TK); BL 51 (TK); Speed 5.00 [0]; Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 10.

Advantages: Conjured Servant [20]; Telekinesis 16 [80]; Spirit (p. B263) [261].

Disadvantages: Bestial [-10]; Cannot Manifest (Change both "Usually On" limitations in the Spirit meta-trait to "Always On") [-10]; Dread (Exorcised or Consecrated Areas, 11 yards) [-20]; Mute [-25]; Weakness (Exorcism, 1d per 5 minutes) [-5].

Skills: Brawling-14 [12]; Dropping-9 [1]; Throwing-14 [16].

Notes: Killed by 10 points of damage; can be summoned again in 10 minutes. Can strike with TK for 1d+1 cr. TK range is 10 yards; must stay at least 11 yards away from sacred ground. Will flee from exorcism; takes damage if somehow trapped in the area.

Power Level: To save points, reduce Telekinesis [-5 points/level] or skill levels [Varies], or increase Weakness to 1d per minute [-5]. To spend points, raise Telekinesis [+5 points/level], reduce range of Dread [+1/yard, maximum +10], or remove Cannot Manifest [+10], Dread [+20], or Weakness [+5].

Worked Example: In preparing to take the role of tribe shaman, Red Wolf has bound a Poltergeist to himself. He is only a 100-point character, making the spirit a 150% Power Ally. To save points, he takes it on a 12 or less. Each time he summons the Poltergeist he must roll, and on a 13 or higher, he cannot summon it again for a full day. Still, these are minor things to Red Wolf, as he "flies" towards the sun, held aloft by his spirit's power.

Bound Poltergeist: Allies, 1 Poltergeist, 150% Power, 12 or less (Minion, +0%; Summonable, +100%) [40]

Winged Monkey (75 points)

Attributes: ST 13 [30]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 8 [-40]; HT 12 [20].

Secondary Characteristics: HP 15 [4]; Per 10 [10]; Will 10 [10]; FP - [0]; Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34; Speed 6.00 [0]; Ground Move 6 [0]; Air Move 12 [0]; Dodge 9; Parry 10.

Advantages: Blunt Claws [3]; Conjured Servant [20]; DR 4 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [12]; Flight (Winged, -25%) [30]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Sharp Teeth [1].

Disadvantages: Bestial [-15]; Cannot Speak [-15]; Dyslexia [-10]; Frightens Animals [-10]; Ham-Fisted 2 [-10]; Innumerate [-5]; Social Stigma (Monster) [-15].

Skills: Brawling-14 [4]; Flight-11 [1].

Notes: Killed by 30 points of damage; can be summoned again in 30 minutes. Can claw for 1d+2 cr.

Power Level: To save points, reduce Ground Move [-5/level], DR [-3/level], or Per [-5/level]. To spend points, add Striking ST [+5/level], ST [+10/level], or Enhanced Move (Air) [+20/level].

Worked Example: No one messes with Old Jeb. He's built on 150 points, but he's not very strong . . . not very smart . . . and doesn't have friends in high places. But Jeb has the monkeys. And no one wants Jeb to let the monkeys out. Sure, it'll knock the wind out of him to do it. And sure, it means he'll have to head back up to his house on the hill and spend most of the day casting that spell again. But he'll do it. So just leave Old Jeb alone.

The Monkeys: Allies, 1,000 Flying Monkeys, 50% Power, Constantly Available (Costs Fatigue, 8 FP, -40%; Minion, +0%; Preparation Required, 8 hours, -60%; Summonable, +100%) [144]

Gotta Catch 'Em All!

But what if you just can't bring yourself to settle on one type of Summonable Ally? What about the beastmaster who can summon any living animal? Or the grand mage who can conjure forth whatever elemental he wishes, from flame to iron to sound? Is it possible to build a character who can summon *anything*?

Of course. The key is taking it in two steps. First, determine what the most expensive "conjunction" will be. This might be a single, powerful animal or a swarm of weaker ones. Then, purchase a Modular Ability (Cosmic Pool) that can handle that one conjunction, with the limitation, "Only to buy appropriate Allies with the Summonable enhancement, -50%". Add any other limitations you can live with to get the cost down, of course.

By rearranging the points in your Cosmic Pool, you can use those points to temporarily "purchase" one or more Summonable Allies. The advice on making them Constantly Available is even more apropos here; if you fail a Frequency of Appearance roll for an Ally, it means the points "spent" on that Ally in your Cosmic Pool are tied up for a full day! Similarly, if an Ally dies, the same points are tied up until he comes back from the dead, assuming he has

the Conjured Servant meta-trait (if not, the GM will decide when and if you can use the points again, per the guidelines on p. 37 of the *Basic Set*.)

It's useful to know how many Cosmic Pool points you'll need to allocate to have a certain Summonable Ally available. If we can assume that every Ally will be bought as Constantly Available, Summonable, and the +0% version of Minion, then that tells us:

You'll need to allocate 8 points to have a 25% Power Ally.
You'll need to allocate 16 points to have a 50% Power Ally.
You'll need to allocate 24 points to have a 75% Power Ally.
You'll need to allocate 40 points to have a 100% Power Ally.
You'll need to allocate 80 points to have a 150% Power Ally.

That means that if you have a 40-point Cosmic Pool for Allies, you could have a single 100% Ally [40] "prepped" (i.e., waiting to be summoned). Or you could rearrange your points so you instead have one 75% Ally [24] and one 50% Ally [16] prepped. Or with another rearranging, you could have five 25% Allies [8 each] prepped.

Worked Example: Red Wolf is many years older (and now a 200-point character) and can bind any spirit to himself that he wishes. He may summon and dispel his bound spirits with a moment's thought, but must chant and pray for 10 minutes if he wishes to release his old spirits and bind new ones.

Spirit Binding: Cosmic Pool, 48 points (Only for Summonable Spirit Allies, -50%; Preparation Required, 10 Minutes, to Switch Abilities, -30%) [96]

This gives him 48 points to "spend" on his spirit Allies. Red Wolf normally has two 150-point spirits bound to him (each one is a 75% Power Ally and thus costs 24 points) -- a Poltergeist and a Guardian. He can summon and dismiss either one (or both) at will, as often as he likes. With war approaching, he realizes that he needs something more powerful, and begins to chant and pray. Ten minutes later, he is able to free his old spirits and bind new ones. He "spends" 40 of the points in his Cosmic Pool on a 100% Power Ally -- a 200-point Warrior spirit to fight at his side. Since he has 8 points left over, he "spends" them on a 25% Power Ally -- a 50-point Watcher to act as a lookout. He leaves them unsummoned for now. At this moment, he could summon the Warrior, the Watcher, or both, but he has no ability to summon the Poltergeist or Guardian; they were freed when he reallocated the points in his Cosmic Pool.

Red Wolf now sits and faces the horizon. For he knows . . . the monkeys are coming . . .

I've Got Good News and Bad News

Mixed Successes in *GURPS*

by Matt Riggsby

GURPS provides a simple spectrum of success: critical success, success, failure, critical failure. But while there are some exceptions, what it doesn't generally provide for is the possibility of an ambiguous or mixed success: a character succeeds in the task at hand, *but* succeeds incompletely or in such a way that there are negative consequences later on. For example, a general wins a series of battles but ends up with his supply lines dangerously stretched out, or an occult researcher finally finds the page he's looking for, but the monster chasing him shows up before he can go shopping for components for a banishment ritual. A success with negative consequences is a particularly popular fixture of fantasy. In most stories, spells don't simply fizzle; they work, go terribly wrong, or both. With these guidelines, the GM can blur the line between success and failure into something more interesting.

Getting a Mixed Success

Just when and where to apply mixed successes is up to the GM, depending on how prominently she wants them featured. For example, mixed successes might be used for magic-related activities (if magic is supposed to be particularly mysterious) but not for combat (which is quite fine-grained and has enough die-rolling already). For those skills and situations where the GM wants to employ mixed successes, here are some mechanical suggestions: For unpenalized skills or skill rolls at a bonus, mixed success occurs if the skill roll is made exactly. For penalized rolls, a mixed success occurs on an exact roll or if the roll is made by a margin of half of the total penalty (round up, maximum 5). For example, if rolling at a -4 penalty, a mixed success occurs if the roll succeeds exactly, by one, or by two.

This makes mixed success uncommon but a possibility for routine skill use, but fairly common for highly skilled characters under extreme conditions, and characters with rudimentary skills, when they do succeed, will have mixed successes more often than more skilled ones. To make them occur more uniformly, without character skill being as much of a factor, the GM might apply them only when the target number is rolled exactly or within a fixed margin of error (for example, whenever a skill roll misses by one). If the GM wants to make mixed successes an even more common feature, she might apply them with a margin on both sides of success (for example, if a skill roll is made exactly, misses by one, or succeeds by one).

When rolling at a modified skill of 16+, a 16 is a mixed success. A 17 is still a plain failure, an 18 is still a critical failure, and 3 and 4 are still critical successes, never mixed successes. Unless the GM finds exceptional circumstances, mixed successes should not be applied to contests of skill and other situations where margin of success is already a factor.

The precise effect of a mixed success depends on what a character is attempting to do. Here are some guidelines for specific skills and groups of skills:

Alchemy

The potion is effective but it has an unfortunate [side effect](#). The GM can roll on the table or simply come up with an appropriate one.

Climbing

The climbing surface changes; a piton becomes slightly loose or a foothold snaps and crumbles. Subsequent attempts

to climb that patch are at -2. If that seems inappropriate to the situation, the climber scrapes his hand or foot, leaving a traceable mark on the climbing surface and the climber at -1 to the next Climbing roll.

Craft Skills

For Smith, Carpentry, specialties of Artist (for example, pottery) which are used to produce tools and other functional items, and similar skills, the character produces a serviceable item or successfully repairs a damaged one, but it's notably unattractive. If someone tries to sell it, reduce the price by 5%.

Crewman

Individual rolls against Crewman aren't common, but if they should happen: The character leaves a knot incorrectly tied, a locker unlocked, a deck unswabbed, or doesn't quite complete a task correctly, which causes a problem (probably for somebody else) later. The next Crewman or Shiphandling roll, whichever comes first, made by anyone in the vehicle is at -2. This same effect could be used with Soldier, team sports skills, and other skills that might be used to represent a character's ability to perform tasks in a group context.

Disguise

This applies only to the initial roll for donning a disguise: The disguise is convincing, but it's poorly applied and might fall apart under certain circumstances. A fake moustache may come off if the character drinks a glass of water, sweat may wash off cheap makeup, or a flimsy outfit may rip and reveal his true identity. The character will probably be aware that his disguise is fragile and that he will need to be careful.

Fighting Skills

Combat already has rudiments of mixed success. A character can hit an opponent successfully but do a trivial amount of damage, feints are based on the difference of margins of success in a contest of skills, and a near-miss on some hit locations can mean a successful hit on another. However, if the GM wants to extend mixed successes farther into that area: For to-hit rolls, a mixed success means that because of shock, vibration, glare, or other circumstances, the character will be at -1 to hit the next turn and at -1 to hold on to the weapon if there's an attempt to disarm him during that time. A mixed success on an active defense temporarily puts the character on bad footing, giving him -1 to his defenses the next turn and -1 to resist slams and other attempts to knock him down.

Leadership

The character ends up offending or angering a member of the group he commands. The offended group member's reaction by one step (Good to Neutral, Neutral to Poor, etc.) unless the leader finds out about it and takes steps to repair the damage in the next day or two, requiring a roll against any social skill the GM finds appropriate (which may include Leadership).

Lockpicking

A tool gets stuck and slightly bent, giving a -1 to subsequent lockpicking attempts. If that seems inappropriate (if, say, the tools are a decent-quality modern steel), the lockpicking attempt is particularly noisy, possibly alerting someone if there's an attempt at stealth.

Mechanical/Engineering Skills

When repairing a damaged device or vehicle or inventing a new one, it works but it has a [problem](#). Roll on the table below:

- 3 Overheats easily
- 4 Hates cold starts
- 5 Needs a good whack
- 6 Needs fiddling
- 7 Sensitive to shock
- 8 Needs feng shui
- 9 Noisy
- 10 Leaks
- 11 Vibration
- 12 Intermittent power outages
- 13 Eats power
- 14 Eats consumables
- 15 Hard to control
- 16 Hard to stop
- 17 Needs frequent maintenance/cleaning
- 18 Duct tape repairs

This is by no means a permanent problem, but fixing it will require another skill roll, additional time, and possibly more parts.

Social Skills

For most social skills (Fast Talk, Carousing, Interrogation, Sex Appeal, etc.), the character's mouth writes checks the remainder of his anatomy can't cash. The character is convincing and gets a good reaction, but that reaction is in some danger. Exactly how and why depends very much on the circumstances, but here are some possibilities:

The character has convincingly implied that he is a distant relative, a favorable trading partner, a member of an organization to whom the target owes loyalty or cooperation (such as a church, a law-enforcement body), a prestigious social contact (good spouse material, roadie for a favorite band), or otherwise wealthier, more powerful, or more deserving of cooperation than he actually is. If the target figures this out before the character can substantiate that identity, the target's reaction will drop to Poor.

The character has inadvertently revealed something about himself, his companions, or his mission or contradicts himself in some subtle way. The target will not be immediately tipped off if the character has something to hide, but if they have more interaction, some little bit of knowledge may come back to haunt him.

For police or other official interactions, the character may have made a procedural error which may endanger his standing in the organization, his assignment to the mission, or resulting legal proceedings.

Spells

Bigger spells usually mean greater consequences. For a mixed success with spellcasting, roll 3d plus the amount of energy spent (modified for high skill) on the table below and apply the additional result. If any result is impossible, would have no effect, or makes no sense, reroll.

Roll Effect

- 3 -3 to any DX-based activities until end of next turn. This does effect any DX-related rolls associated with the spell (spell throwing, magic jet, etc.)
- 4 -3 to any IQ-based activities until end of next turn
- 5 Spell costs 1-3 extra points of fatigue
- 6 -2 to any spell resistance rolls for the next day
- 7 -1 to further spellcasting attempts for the next day
- 8 Any spells the caster is maintaining are immediately dropped
- 9 Roll 1d. On 1-3, the caster acquires the Frightens Animals disadvantage for a day. On 4-6, the opposite happens.

- Nearby animals, from insects to livestock, will flock to him.
- 10 For the (margin of failure) hours, the spell "echoes," randomly producing shadows of its effect as deemed appropriate by the GM. For example, if a wizard has cast a Fire spell, he might occasionally set small objects on fire when he touches them. If he has cast an Information spell, he might go into momentary dazes where he suddenly discovers insignificant childhood memories of acquaintances and the locations of lost socks. This should be a nuisance effect, but it could cause serious embarrassment and draw attention to the spell-caster.
 - 11 Caster temporarily acquires the Unlucky disadvantage for a day.
 - 12 Caster is afflicted with a one-point Curse.
 - 13 Caster gains a Supernatural Feature for the next (margin of failure) days.
 - 14 The spell effects both caster and target.
 - 15 Caster regains fatigue at a quarter of the usual rate until fully rested.
 - 16 If the spell has a variable energy cost for initial casting, the caster immediately spends the lesser of the maximum energy or enough to take him to zero fatigue. This comes directly off of the caster's fatigue and may not be absorbed by powerstones.
 - 17 The spell cannot be cast again for another (margin of failure) days.
 - 18 The caster gets a sharp electric shock whenever he touches or uses a magical item, including powerstones, for the next (margin of failure) days, causing 1d points worth of pain.
 - 19 As with #11 above, but for (margin of failure) days
 - 20 The spell effects everyone in a (margin of failure) yard radius, including the caster.
 - 21 1d6 points of fatigue spent on the spell come off of hit points instead.
 - 22 A demon or other entity appears within one day to attack the caster, as per a critical failure (although the spell does still succeed).
 - 23 One of the above effects (reroll, ignoring any roll of 23+), but it also happens to the next person the spellcaster touches or is touched by.
 - 24 One of the above effects (reroll, ignoring any roll of 23+), but it also happens to the next person the spellcaster successfully casts a spell on.
 - 25+ Roll twice and apply both effects (rerolling any rolls of 25+)

The GM might consider extending the margin of failure that can get a mixed successes for spells farther than for other skills. For example, mundane skills only get a mixed success on an exact skill roll, whereas spells get them if the skill roll fails within the half-penalty margin. This option makes magicians more effective in the short term, in that they'll be able to cast more spells successfully, but at the same time riskier and more likely to harm their friends in the long run or render themselves ineffective in the process of doing magic. Wizards in that situation are likely to save the big spells only for times of great need, which is a bit closer to fictional wizards like Tolkein's Gandalf and Robert E. Howard's Thoth-Amon, who are theoretically very powerful but rarely seem to get around to doing any actual spellcasting.

Survival

If the character is looking for food, shelter, etc., the character or *one* person he is looking after (select randomly) takes 1d-2 damage. If the character is using Survival to find a path somewhere, he finds not the best route, but the second best. Increase optimum travel time by 10%.

Traps

The trap isn't as well-hidden as it might be. It will be effective, but someone looking for traps will be at +2 to find it.

Other Skills

Spell Example

Zappo the Wizard knows the Explosive Fireball spell at skill 16. In a particular difficult situation, he ends up with an effective skill of 13 while cranking up a three-die fireball, spending 5 points of Fatigue on it. He rolls a 14; Zappo gets his fireball, but something else goes wrong. The GM rolls 3d and gets a 10. Plus five for the amount of energy in the spell, the result is 13. Zappo will need a lot of rest to fully recover from the mystical strain.

For other skills, the GM may come up with complications as appropriate. For example, a mixed success for Architecture skill might produce a building with occasionally noisy air conditioning, a few leaky pipes, or slightly too-small closets. In some situations, a mixed success might not have any notable consequences; a mixed success of on a Performance roll might result in a dropped line covered by a quick ad-lib, which won't matter to most of the audience even if they notice it. Don't forget that the skill use was, ultimately, successful and the effects of that success should be applied as fully as possible. Any negative consequences should come afterwards, unless there is a clear and appropriate way of modifying the success (see, for example, the guidelines here for mechanical and engineering skills). If nothing else comes to mind, the initial success sends the character down a slightly wrong path or puts him slightly off balance, so the next use of the skill suffers a -1 penalty, takes 5-10% longer than usual, produces something which costs 5-10% less or is 5-10% less efficient or powerful than usual or incurs a -1 reaction penalty with someone who witnessed the clumsy execution of his task.

Pyramid Review

State of the Art: 2064 (for Shadowrun)

Published by [FanPro](#)

Written by Audun Myhra Bergwitz, Rob Boyle, Brian Cross, Drew Curtis, Robert Derie, Patrick Goodman, Joshua Howell, Jong-Won Kim, Robyn King-Nitschke, Stephan Meijerhof, James Nugent, Rich Osterhout, Antonio Pucci, Sergio Pulido, Jon Szeto, Peter Taylor, & Malik Toms
Cover by Fred Hooper

Illustrated by Steven Bagatzky, Shane Coppage, Johan Egerkrans, Marcio Fiorito, & Klaus Schwerinski

168-page perfect bound soft cover; \$24.99

As we move closer to the release of *Shadowrun Fourth Edition*, FanPro continues to support the current version of the game with supplements exploring the early-to-mid-2060s of the Awakened World. The latest is a sequel of sorts, *State of the Art: 2064* following on from [State of the Art: 2063](#). Like the earlier book, this is an anthology the contents of which do two things. Most obviously it presents new information previously unavailable for *Shadowrun Third Edition*, but it also expands upon and updates various aspects of the Sixth Age previously covered under earlier editions of the game.

In the case of *State of the Art: 2064*, these supplements include *Magic in the Shadows* and *Awakenings*, the *Lone Star* sourcebook, and the more recent [Shadows of Europe](#). The book also updates storylines, plots, and events of the latter book as well as [Year of the Comet](#), [Dragons of the Sixth World](#), [Threats 2](#), [Target: Wastelands](#), and even *Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets*. All of this is presented in the usual format for a *Shadowrun* supplement, as a series of online documents posted to the Shadowlands Bulletins Boards, then discussed, commented upon, and disparaged by various interested parties. The writing is decent, and while the best of the artwork is not a little creepy, the least of it is too broad and too cartoon-like in feel. Unlike other *Shadowrun* books, the game information is placed at the end of each chapter rather than at the end of the book.

The first of the book's five chapters is entitled "Games of State." This is a look at the state of espionage some 60 years from now, updating the three main methods of intelligence gathering: human, imagery, and signals intelligence. Along with describing spy satellite capabilities, rules are given for player character spies requesting their use. Magic also has its use, with commonly available spells such as *Mind Probe*, *Trid Phantasm*, and *Invisibility* forcing intelligence agencies to employ increasingly stringent methods to the point of brainwashing to keep deep cover operatives from being detected. The "how" is followed by the "who," the "why," and the "where," detailing the current agencies of 2064, their targets, and the major focal points in the espionage game. This includes not only traditional agencies such as the CIA, MI-5, and the UGB (current version of the KGB), but this being *Shadowrun*, also other more corporate agencies that have joined the fray. Thus Argus, based in the Allied German States, is a for-hire intelligence agency that operates worldwide, while the late Dunkelzahn's Watchers are still operating, whether as freelancers or for some other dragon-connected master. Current espionage hotspots include the Grand Tour of European glitterati, the California Protectorate occupied by Colonel Saito's Japanese troops, the free island of Hainan off the Chinese coast, and Brussels, the headquarters of the New European Economic Community. Game information includes placing requests for spysat imagery, new Edges and Flaws, plus spells and equipment. This is a sound introduction to espionage in 2064, though a

GM wanting more advice on running a spy-themed game should look elsewhere.

"The Path of the Adept" sets out to address the adept's role in the game. Too often he gets relegated to the role of the gang's combat or stealth specialist. The chapter opens up the "Way of the Adept," presenting an array of options for anyone whose magic is extremely personal and usually physical in nature. Now an adept can attune himself with animals, even empowering them with his own abilities, or even with weapons and vehicles to perform amazing stunts. He can enhance his intellectual and perceptive capabilities to achieve greater cognition, become a virtuoso artiste, or even temporarily achieve astral projection. The combat specialist can now make Penetrating and Elemental Strikes, or even Side Step an incoming attack, but players can now create the complete Social Adept using abilities like Commanding Voice, Cool Resolve, Facial Sculpt, Kinesics, and Voice Control. Overall, this is a nice new box of tool for the Adept player, but perhaps the writing of the chapter is a little dry.

The other side of the law from most shadowrunners comes under the spotlight in "Behind the Badge," focusing in particular on Lone Star, the private law enforcement provider and its standard operating procedures. Naturally no two such companies are alike, but much of the information here is applicable to any one of the private police groups operating in 2064. All have to enforce the law according to their license and jurisdiction, whilst still operating as a corporation. Thus successfully upholding the law, keeping crime rates down, and arresting the "right" perpetrators looks good for business, but wrongful arrest and police brutality can only result in lawsuits, insurance claims, and a poor corporate image. But the Awakened World is far more dangerous, with suspects wielding a multitude of hardware, cyberware, and spellware, often cause enough for the acceptable application of lethal force. Up until, that is, the cops run up against the limits of their jurisdiction -- usually mega corp territory. Perhaps the most salient fact that shadowrunners need to know is what Lone Star or Knight Errant will throw at them. In the case of Lone Star, its Fast Response Teams are like the better-known SWAT units, only without the finesse.

After detailing the various police departments and units, and even suggesting how you go about bribing a cop, the chapter takes a contemporary and scientific turn in examining forensics in the Sixth Age. Little more than a primer with a nod or two to the use of magic, it is at least something for both player and GM to keep in mind. What happens after a character is arrested, convicted, and incarcerated is looked at, leading to a potentially interesting mini-campaign with the characters locked up and having to survive with cyberware disabled. Magic using characters get it worse, with every attempt made to prevent spellcasting, some methods even inducing insanity. Several adventure seeds are included to support such a campaign, but they are crammed into the chapter's end along with the new equipment. Despite lacking the depth of the earlier *Lone Star* sourcebook, "Behind the Badge" presents another good overview of its subject, giving pointers to bear in mind. GMs wanting more information on running a cops or C.S.I.-orientated game will have to look to other supplements.

Like the earlier "The Path of the Adept," the "Old World Magic" is another dry read. It supplements and expands upon information first seen in *Shadows of Europe*, specifically the magic traditions that have appeared and developed since 2012. They include Neo-Paganism -- Wicca and Witchcraft; Druidism -- Celtic and Wild as opposed to the Hermetic Druidism of the New Druidic Movement; as well as Norse and Roman-Hellenistic paganism and various ethnic magics. While many traditions abound and are accepted in Europe, Hermeticism is rife with academic rivalry. Its various schools range from Classic and Teutonic Hermeticism to Avant-garde Thaumaturgy and Unified Magic Theorists, all based in universities across the continent with study circles of adherents driving hard to make the big break through. In game terms the Neo-Pagan traditions follow the same rules as those for Shaman and Idol-Followers, but with tweaks here and there to add the necessary color. A list of appropriate idols is included. The various schools are handled in the same manner.

The last chapter is where *State of the Art: 2064* really keeps the juicy stuff, useable by any GM. "Culture Shock" is a round-up of the most notable events, news items, cultural and social happenings of the previous 12 months. The "Orxploitation Movement" in music (following the appearance of an Ork language primer), Corp Vogue or what it *really* takes to get ahead these days, Gene Art, and gambling are covered, before the chapter begins a series of Top 10 lists. From top shadowruns and the best places to be seen to most wanted criminals, suits, and scientists, these lists are the ripe with possibilities and can be used by GM as adventure hooks or purely as background flavor. One new story, the announcement that the 2072 Olympics are to be held in the divided city of Denver, is a sure lead into *Shadowrun, Fourth Edition*, which advances the game's time line to 2070.

Perhaps a little too dry in places, this is another case of FanPro pushing the game one more increment. The best and most versatile of its five chapters is certainly the last, but there are players will equally appreciate the chapters on the Adept and European magic. Like its predecessor, ***State of the Art: 2064*** is another decent supplement for ***Shadowrun***, updating the setting just a little while adding more background and game options.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

d20 Apocalypse

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Eric Cagle, Darrin Drader, Charles Ryan, & Owen K.C. Stephens

Edited by Tammie Webb Ryan

Art & Graphics by Dave Johnson, Kalman Andrasofszky, Grafiksismik, Inc., Karl Kersch, Ramon Perez, Chris Trevas, Dee Barnett, & Kate Irwin

96-page full-color softcover; \$19.95

As they progress through different genres, it seems the Wizards of the Coast are refining their focus into ever-smaller chunks of roleplaying. Their *d20 System* books went through fantasy and Modern, then spun off a smaller Future reference. Now they've lopped off a still-tinier slice called *d20 Apocalypse*.

d20 Future covered the after-the-holocaust setting in brief -- covered a number of things briefly, in fact -- but only grazed several targets in favor of tools needed to build one's own futuristic campaign from the ground up. You'd think that would mean that, with a whole book given over to the apocalypse, there'd be room for the in-depth material missing from the parent volume. And you'd be wrong.

This book is the roleplaying equivalent of a drive-by shooting. It comes in low, strafes some pretty specific marks, and moves on with little explanation. To be fair, the subjects it touches on are important to most campaigns set after Man's fall. There's some stuff about rebuilding things, vehicles specifically, and it glosses over the details. It forgoes whether you've found the right Chevrolet distributor cap in favor of generic considerations about whether one scrounges or barter for the right sorts or quality of parts, so the process is streamlined. There's a page or three on actual Mel Gibson-style stunts out on the roads, and a nice system for customizing vehicles, but the counter to all this is: It's perplexing how much text is used on structures.

Roads -- the kinds of roads, the shape they're in, how long it takes to get from A to B -- it's like an RPG manual written by a pragmatic Jack Kerouac. Buildings end up much the same: how big are they, how close were they to the explosions, who's been rifling through them . . . If Frank Lloyd Wright is in your game group, he'll swoon. You can also find lists of what can be scrounged from the rubble, and what kind of gear the industrious souls of the bleak future come up with. Some of it is jury-rigged like weapons that spit old, irradiated materials, while others are staples like ethanol vehicle conversions. All these bits work together well as a chapter, but are you buying this book to read up on interstates vs. dirt roads? These overlong sidebars aren't as tiresome in the short view, but when you finish reading the book and realize what you don't get for your money . . .

When you're ready to attack the PCs, GMs will find natural hazards -- or rather, what now passes for natural -- and a few new monsters with which to vex them. The four horsemen are no longer myths, gates spit out dimensional invaders, and robots run rampant. The clouds above (a favorite for this book, it would seem) hold everything from acid rain to tortured souls, should you want the environment to hit the team instead of the legions of unnature. The heroes themselves are tailored to suit; not all professions from *d20 Modern* fit here, especially if the game starts a thousand years after the fall, which gives rise to new professions and added prestige classes like the necessary Road Warrior.

The only standout is the Evolutionary, a being who can manipulate and switch his own mutations (also like **d20 Future**, the prestige classes are scattered throughout the book according to their appropriateness to a setting, not gathered together).

Deciding what goes into the beginning of the end is solid; when and how the end of the world gets underway is covered in nice detail. It doesn't offer much that's new -- most roleplayers probably know to get the ball rolling with nukes or a disease or some sort of invasion -- but it's thorough, and expands on **d20 Modern's** nuclear weapons material. Pick what kills the planet, how people adapt, and how quickly the campaign gets going thereafter (did it happen last week, or two generations ago?), and you've got an apocalypse.

The art of the apocalypse is perhaps the book's best feature. All the pictures are cool and exciting, and they'll make you want to start in on your setting in short order. There's a small montage of images dipping into the crack of the pages, which is un-noteworthy and a bit of a waste, but it's better than having the text creep in there instead.

It's this close attention to the trees that leaves the apocalyptic forest mostly unexplored. Where it could have been a companion to **d20 Future**, it instead promulgates the same errors and oversights. There are new tools, sure, and some are on target, but the sense of wonder isn't there. There's nothing about putting the party through its paces. You won't find advice about anything as exotic as a theme for your game, nor anything as prosaic as a reason for party coherence. Are you rebuilding? Fighting? Exploring? Backhanded help comes in the form of sample campaigns, vulgar in their plainness. There's a half-decent one about sleepers waking up to find the tragedy they were meant to anticipate has passed without them, but the other two pieces are routine at best and derivative at worst ("The End" is still commercially available, yet here it is again in slightly altered form).

There's not much in **d20 Apocalypse** that any decent GM couldn't provide himself, and some obvious GM stuff isn't included, which means you *do* have to provide it yourself. There's no examination of the genre, no attempt to make it seem appealing. The Earth has collapsed many times before in RPGs, and it takes some doing to make the end of the world seem commonplace.

--Andy Vetromile

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Unskilled Man's Bluff

The past couple of weeks I've been out and about, tossing my hat into the ring at various temp agencies. I've never been to such a place before, so it's been fascinating to me . . . well, as fascinating as it can be filling out the same paperwork over and over again. (It's sobering to think that I've written my personal information on enough pieces of paper in the past two weeks to give each person in the Vatican City their own scrap with which to steal my identity. Fortunately, the significance of identity theft crimes among the residents of the Vatican City is a fair bit less than the rest of the world. But I digress.)

Anyway, among other things I've learned about myself are my test results in various skills. For example, I learned that I'm rated at 85 words a minute in my typing abilities . . . meaning that I should be able to type this column in less than 12 minutes. (Of course, that relies on me having at least 85 words a minute that are worth transcribing; I rarely get above that threshold once I filter out the incessant chorus of "badger badger badger badger badger badger badger badger mushroom MUSHROOM!") Since my resumé had listed 50 words per minute -- the amount I had been tested for previously in my junior year of high school -- it was a nice surprise.

And then there's the other side of testing. See, I was also rated for my abilities in various software. This included the word processor Microsoft Word, the spreadsheet program Microsoft Excel, the presentation software Microsoft PowerPoint, the database program Microsoft Access, and the operating system Microsoft Tear Out The Last Remaining Tufts of Your Hair As Random Processes Hog 100% of All System Resources for No Discernable Reason XP Professional.

Now, prior to testing I had expected my skills with Microsoft Word to be pretty high, since -- being a writer and all -- I have an affinity for word processors the way Aquaman does with fish, complete with the concentric circles jutting out from my head that I use to control them. During the test I became less sure, since the software was testing aspects of the software that I'd never even heard of, let alone use with any degree of proficiency. (The number of times I've needed to do a mail merge, text box foreground positioning, or chart calculation while writing my column has been quite small.) Nevertheless I soldiered on, and eventually ended up with a score of . . . 97%.

My second test was with Microsoft Excel, which I use occasionally but I've never considered myself a spreadsheet guy. In my life, I've probably logged about 40 hours of spreadsheet time, including my old AppleWorks days on my Apple IIs. ([Beagle Bros rule!](#)¹) Compare this with my word processor, where I've frequently logged 40 hours at a stretch, avoiding writing. So I'm not exactly a guru. This time, I got a 100%.

Next I moved on to PowerPoint, a program I had accidentally loaded once (as part of the Microsoft BloatOffice 2000 pack) and played with for a few minutes before clicking "Close." Again, I got a 97%.

And finally, I received testing in Microsoft Access, a program which I have *never used once*. I got a 100% on their testing.

It was about at this point that I found myself uttering a small prayer that the temp agencies didn't perform similar testing on would-be doctors, air traffic controllers, or emergency-planning coordinators.

Anyway, as I was reveling in my mastery of all computer skills, I tried thinking (naturally) about how to translate this into gaming and, by extension, a column for this week. And I realized that the ability to bluff is one of those tricky ones in gaming. On the one hand, if bluffing is too weak, then no one would ever become skilled in it; those "skill points" would be put to better use elsewhere. On the other hand, if it's too useful, then players might be tempted to skimp on more well-rounded aspects of a character, choosing instead to bump "bluff" to astronomical levels. (Of course, this variable utility is something that crops up in all systems for various skills. For example, practically all the adventures for the West End Games' edition of the *Star Wars RPG* could be resolved with high enough levels of blaster and dodge. Then again, in thinking about the movies, this may not be wholly inaccurate . . .)

The ability to bluff is one of those that often appears in the "real world"; whether we meet people who are able to con

their way into situations and responsibilities beyond their own, or we hear about those on the news who have managed to bamboozle the right people, chances are we all have a good idea of what bluffing does, and how useful it can be. So what's wrong with taking it to an astronomical level?

Well, there are two things that keep the usefulness of bluff in check. First, you can't actually use bluff to *do* anything constructive. While you might be able to, say, con others into thinking you're a doctor, that won't actually help the person on the operating table. Of course, bluffing can be useful to get others who can be constructive to do so, but in dramatic situations you're often only left with yourself. And if you don't have the abilities you say you do, well . . . there might be problems.

Which leads nicely into the second point: I suspect (although I have no proof) that most big conners are eventually revealed. While this can lead to interesting storytelling potential -- When will my character slip up? When will it all come crashing down? -- it also means that the character is probably destined for an ignoble fall. Some game systems suit this well; for example, "Destiny" or "Dark Fate" might be disadvantages for such a character. However, a player whose PC is the consummate con artist may need to prepare himself to lose that character; if he doesn't, he may end up disappointed when the villagers eventually take up pitchforks and torches.

In the meantime, I've got some preparing of my own to do; I'm going to apply to be head instructor of Microsoft products at a local training agency. With my test scores, what could possibly go wrong?

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

1

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10 A$="JACKZIP":FOR H=1 TO 7:CALL -198:FOR S=1 TO 16*(ASC(MID$(A$,H))-64):NEXT S, H
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Yrth 2

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Genre: Science Fiction

Style: Infinite Worlds

Theme(s): Survival, Discovery, Community Building, Escape

*The starship **Venture** lurched, gripped by the weird energies of the space anomaly.*

"Grayson, report! What is this thing?" cried Captain Church.

The Science Officer looked up from his scanner. "Unknown, Captain. Scanners are jammed."

"We're not receiving any positional information from interstellar beacons, and the navcomp has locked," reported Andrei, the Navigator.

A sudden lurch rocked the bridge. Fingers gripped duralum consoles, fighting against the inertia that threatened to knock them all from their stations.

The captain's comm-panel whistled. He punched the button angrily, "Monty: go!"

"She can't take much more of this strain, Cap'n. The engines are twisting in their housings. If we don't shut them down, they'll crack us up!"

Church looked out at the roiling mass of red and purple mystery that pounded his ship -- his ship! -- with hatred in his eyes. Through gritted teeth, he told the Chief Engineer, "Shut them down." He turned to the Helmsman and said, "Hikaru, use thrusters to maintain a consistent orientation. If you can."

"Aye-aye, Captain. It'll be just like shooting the rapids."

As the constant hum of the engines faded, so did the buffeting. The flight of the starship smoothed, and something new appeared in the viewscreen: a circle of starry black. Escape.

Science Officer Grayson said, "Normal space, Captain, at 33 mark 16 mark 45. Possibly a way out of this anomaly."

"Transmit coordinates to Nav station. Andrei, lay in a course as best you can and sync with Helm. Helm, hit that target."

"Aye-aye, sir!" his crew responded as they snapped to his orders. Almost instantly, the ship's nose swung to aim at the calm eye in the raging space-storm. Faster than they expected, it soared through the hole and found itself . . . somewhere.

"Department heads, report."

Communications Officer Nyota said, "All decks have reported in. Minor damage in modules Six Alpha, Twelve Beta, and Fourteen Delta. One casualty, in Sickbay -- Dr. Hatfield reports that Ensign Leslie has broken his arm; he's welding the bone now. We are being hailed by a broad spectrum of signals, ranging from radio to tachyon-packet comms to several of unknown types. Translating and decoding now."

*Andrei's fingers danced across his board. "Navcomp has unlocked. We are no longer in Sector 42. Navcomp is correlating scanner data, but I can tell you this already: we are not reading **any** navigational beacons."*

From the speaker came the voice of the Chief Engineer. "Engines recycling power build from hard disengage. Estimated operational in two minutes."

Hikaru spoke up. "Helm unresponsive, Captain. I have no control. Directional thrusters are dead."

"Burned out in the anomaly?"

"No sir. No damage on the circuits. They're just not working."

*Grayson spoke. "We appear to be caught in a powerful tractor beam. Much more powerful than any we've come across before. Scanners indicate we are in near orbit of a small binary planet: an Earthlike -- intriguing! -- a **remarkably** Earthlike primary, with an extremely large moon . . . Wait."*

The science officer adjusted his scanners for more detailed readings; meanwhile, the central viewscreen displayed the small blue-green world growing below them. "Captain, the readings indicate that the gross details of the planet and its satellite match that of Earth and its Moon with a 75% -- and rising as scanning continues -- correspondence. Planetary masses, period of rotation, spectrographic analysis of the atmosphere -- they all line up within thousandths of percentage points."

"The continents are wrong," said Andrei.

"And despite all the signals we're receiving, the Earth comm-beacon is not one of them," said Nyota.

Church scowled. "I want answers, now. Grayson, find out where the tractor beam is coming from. Nyota, decode those signals. Monty, I want a diagnostic team on the thrusters, and I want those engines ready."

"The moon is coming up from behind the planet," reported Andrei.

The bridge crew all looked as one to see the golden sphere sliding out from behind the disc of the strange, Earthlike planet.

The Helmsman said, in a whisper, "That's no moon. . . That's a space station."

** * **

Torn from their home universes, the valiant spacemen and astronauts of a dozen worlds have been brought to a strange alternate Earth. But why? And by whom?

Welcome to Yrth 2.

map

What Everybody Knows

Not much.

A storm in space, an anomaly, a Vortex, grabbed hold of your ship and plunked you into a near-planetary orbit around a world that suspiciously resembles Earth in many (but not all) regards. The Moon has been replaced by a giant, golden space station. The rest of the solar system is hauntingly similar to the Sol System. The constellations are nearly the same, and hint that the local year is AD 2005.

Your ship was hailed with a wide array of methods, in a bewildering number of codes and languages. When translated, the message is simply: "For the safety of your vessel, turn over landing operations to Yrth 2 Ground Control. Thank you." Repeated over and over. Furthermore, your craft was also scanned deeply. Both the communications and the scanning originate from the Moon-station.

After this, a powerful tractor beam (from a surface station on the planet below) locked onto your ship and smoothly brought it into the atmosphere. Your ship grounded safely, in an area suitable for such. Indeed, the long-overgrown remnants of ancient landing pads and abandoned ship-cradles surround you -- the ruins of a spaceport.

Scanning technologies report numerous glitches and artifacts, however, which seem to indicate that the planet holds zones

where the laws of physics *change* -- some technologies cease to operate within them. The zones range in sizes from a small cottage up to the entire volume of the Grand Canyon.

The air outside is breathable and safe. The observable plant and animal types seem to be terrestrial, but strange (see below). There are no other detectable communications waves at first, but eventually signal chatter will arise from other kidnapped spacecraft. In a dozen different methods and languages, all ask the exact same questions you are: Where are we? How did we get here? Why are we here? What's going on? Who are you? Now what do we do? How do we get back home?

Where Are We?

According to the automatic hail, *Yrth 2*, whatever that means.

How Did We Get Here?

Through the Vortex. Possibly by a mis-jump, teleport accident, spacetime anomaly, big explosion, flawed experiment, hyperspace pothole, lost conveyor, whatever -- somehow, you slid into the Vortex and popped out here.

Why Are We Here?

Unknown.

What's Going On?

Weird Science(s)

Spacecraft from numerous different space-time continua have fallen through the Vortex and been brought to *Yrth 2*. Most of the victims of the Vortex appear to be human, but there are a number of modified humans and non-humans, too. The home continua of these other visitors appear to have wildly different technologies in various stages of development, possibly even utilize variant physical laws. Some groups have devices and abilities that seem like purest science fiction (or fantasy) to others.

The strange artifacts detected by scanning technologies indicate that the local reality is "swiss-cheesed" with weird potentials that permit the operation of highly-sophisticated or divergent technologies. These *Science Zones* also permit the use of unbelievable super-sciences and "supernatural" abilities. While many Zones are static, others move (some slowly, some quickly) and can pass through material objects: Science Zones sometimes combine into larger Zones and sometimes "bounce off" of each other.

Preliminary data points to the following:

- The ambient *Science Zone One (SZ1)* permits technology roughly equivalent to that of Earth circa 2005. Technology more advanced than roughly 2025 operates weakly, and the technologies from 2070 or later and weird super-sciences are non-functional.
- A *Science Zone Two (SZ2)* allows technologies from approximately 2025 through 2070 to operate normally; some variant and super-sciences work normally, others weakly.
- A *Science Zone Three (SZ3)* tolerates all technologies and super-sciences at normal capacity.

(See below, *Science Zoning*, for some rules implementation ideas for Science Zones.)

Yrth 2 Flora & Fauna

The plants and animals of *Yrth 2* appear to be the same as those of Earth at first glance. However, upon taking a second look, subtle differences in coloration and behavior can be noticed (tiger-striped squirrels, red-colored clover, metallic butterflies, and the like).

Additionally, the lower lifeforms of the planet have evolved to take advantage of the remains of the technological society that once covered this world -- many plants can grow on metal or silicon glass surfaces; some animals can consume rubber or

carbon, and so forth.

Furthermore, when within a SZ2 or higher Zone, some life displays remarkable levels of intelligence or incredible abilities -- laser eyes, limb regeneration, cloaking camouflage, etc. Worse still, at SZ3, inert environmental nanotech reactivates, forming giant "nanoblooms" which can have weird and dangerous effects -- electroplating exposed surfaces, breaking down iron into a bloody fluid, "possessing" biological lifeforms to repair nearby nanofactory units, and so on.

Ruins & Remnants

Most native Yrth 2 surface structures have been much affected by the altered flora and fauna of the planet, so ruins in various levels of decay (depending upon the standard local Zone level, as well as the past effect of moving Zones) are everywhere. The only exceptions tend to be the tractor beam surface stations (see below) and some underground installations.

And then there are the remnants of other structures -- the ships and buildings of long-gone Vortex victims. Some remain as sealed monuments of gleaming metal, others are nothing more than duraluminum skeletons. Who knows what strange technologies, treasures, or beings remain within, waiting for the ambient Science Zone to swell high enough for them to reactivate?

Who Are You?

Several groups have been pulled to Yrth 2 through the Vortex. Here are some of them.

The August Project ("Augustinians")

The August Project possessed a mandate from their government to explore the concept of quantum time and alternate worlds. They succeeded, beyond their imaginings. The experimental Para-Continuum Viewer (PCV) they had created attracted the Vortex, which ripped up their entire 12-acre campus and plopped it onto Yrth 2. Twenty men and women -- scientists, security guards, administrative staff, and government agents -- are now marooned in another universe.

Augustinians are unmodified humans from a 2005 Earth. Their technology is "vanilla" SZ1, except for the PCV. The viewer will only attract the Vortex's "ingress" while in an SZ1 region, can be used to get brief glimpses into other continua within an SZ2, and will work properly in an SZ3.

M*A*S*H 7044th ("Seventy-Fours")

In 2074, during Operation Saint Helena, this Mobile Army Surgical Hospital fled Peruvian invaders in the American protectorate of Brazil. . . and right into the gaping maw of the Vortex. During the transit, the Primary Hospital Hovercraft was damaged, inadvertently releasing a sizable portion of its medical nano-tech and greatly damaging two of its four nano-facs. Furthermore, six of the MASH's twelve Sky Ambulances were lost, and half of its Hover Jeeps. Fifty doctors, nurses, orderlies, and support troops work to repair the MASH in a strange new world -- one that's a virtual desert compared to the thick nano-sea they used to swim in.

Seventy-Fours are humans with extensive nanotechnological modifications. Each of them possesses internal, synthetic organs that creates nanobots for their health, well-being, and job requirements. The overwhelming majority of these nanobots are medical in nature, but half of the support troopers have potent combat-oriented nano capabilities.

Their technology can only operate at maximum potential, and on external targets, in an SZ3 region. Within SZ2 regions, a Seventy-Four's nanotech can only affect him-, her-, or itself internally. In SZ1 areas, nanotech does not work at all.

Psiders

In a worldline where the UN -- bolstered by the shadowy Metapsychic Directorate -- has highly-regulated psionic abilities and completely outlawed unlicensed psionic use, the Psiders are rebels fighting Big Brain Brother's growing control over the entire Earth. While escaping from an UNMD Mind-Prison, captured rebels utilized an experimental psi-drug meant to boost their abilities. Instead, their minds linked into a psychic gestalt and summoned the Vortex. Seventeen people appeared on Yrth 2: 8 Psider rebels (3 male and 5 female), 5 non-psychic prison guards (3 male and 2 female), 3 lab workers (1 female

doctor, 1 male nurse, 1 male lab assistant), and 1 psychic UNMD Agent (female).

Non-psychic Psiders are typical humans. Psiders are humans with psionic abilities; on Yrth 2, these powers work variably. In SZ3, all powers work normally at full strength; note that psychic teleportation *will not work* in regions below SZ3. In SZ2, only limited and weak forms of sensory abilities like telepathy or precognition function -- though a powerful psychokinetic *might* be able to do slow and tiring micro-TK. In SZ1, psionic powers do not work at all.

Psider technology is vanilla for the most part, but its knowledge, techniques, and devices in the fields of biochemistry, genetics, and parapsychology should be considered SZ2. Psi-drugs (usually boosters and dampeners) are SZ3.

Rocket Leaguers ("Gabbrookians")

The Rocket League patrol ship *GSS Jeljellek*, on sentry duty along the Zevellun-Gabrook (read: "Venus-Earth") run, accidentally flew through the Vortex. In their home universe, Earth is known as "Gabrook," and is much drier. Somehow, this difference led to the rise of a variant human species. Fifteen highly-trained, green-skinned, pointy eared Rocket Leaguers (13 male, plus the Plucky Girl Reporter and the Mad Scientist's Daughter) have been trapped in a new universe . . . and they relish the challenge.

Gabbrookians are wildly variant humans, possibly descended from a highly mutagenic Neanderthal stock. Their skin contains a green pigment that (somehow) protects them from excessive electromagnetic radiation -- especially the UV rays in sunlight. They are slightly stronger than standard humans and have much keener hearing -- and seem to have a species-wide talent for pulp sci-fi gadgeteering!

Gabrook is apparently equivalent to a 1980 Earth (when comparing their astronomical data), except that their technology is pure Flash Gordon/Buck Rogers (SZ2) -- rocket packs, ray guns, vacuum tube computers. In an SZ1 region, this pulp-tech works only half as well, at best. Interestingly, in an SZ3 region, their pulp-tech is uncontrollably *potent*, and tends to overload dramatically.

Syria Planum Colonists ("Martians")

In their home universe, it is 2100: Man has colonized the Moon and Mars. While the Moon Domes have been inhabited for four decades, the Mars Domes are much younger -- only nine years of operation for the oldest. This Dome, the Syria Planum Colonial Habitat, was home to 250 men, women, and children before it was scooped out of its Martian crater and dropped onto Yrth.

Martians are essentially unmodified humans from an alternate 2100. They tend to be slightly paler and weaker than their terrestrial brethren. Although Martian space-medicine, life systems, and aerospace engineering are effectively SZ2, the majority of their tech is basically vanilla 2005 technology, streamlined, ruggedized, and miniaturized. They have a lot of supplies, well-suited for setting up a colony or homestead: tools, foodstuffs, building materials, laboratory and manufacturing modules, water purifiers, etc.

Tin Soldiers

In 2065 (on their alternate Earth), Indian cyborg soldiers of the Fifth Army invaded Dar es Salaam, capital city of the former nation of Tanzania, now the metropole of the East African Alliance. The EAA responded with its own modified soldiers, and cyberpunkian war raged. Then, the Vortex scooped up an Indian platoon that had been bivouacking on the shores of Lake Victoria. The Tin Soldiers are composed of the Lieutenant, the Platoon Sergeant, and three eight-cyborg squads (Heavy Fire Squad, all male; Recon Squad, all female; and Specialist Squad, half male and half female).

Tin Soldiers are humans with extensive advanced cybernetic modifications. All possess dataports and comm-packages built into their craniums, one cyber-eye (low-light, telescoping, targeting), and emergency medical pharm-modules tucked into their internal organs to provide intravenous nutrition, vitamins, analgesics, stimulants, depressants, anticonvulsants, and so forth.

In addition to these basics, each squadmember has their own particular package of cybermods. Heavy Fire Squadmembers tend to have extremely strong cyber-limbs and dermal plating. Recon Squad members usually have improved reflexes, an

advanced cyber-eye (rangefinding, active IR, LADAR, enhanced gigapixel photographic capability, etc.), and internal electronic countermeasure modules. However, Specialist Squadmembers can individually have *any type of cybermod* -- artificial gills, glider flaps, acid glands, universal digestion, climbing suckers, cyber-tentacles, whatever.

This cybertech can only operate at maximum potential in an SZ2 or higher region. When within SZ1 regions, cybertech does not work well; indeed, Tin Soldiers often refer to their mods feeling "listless" or "numb" in those Zones.

Vortex Victims Recap Table

Name	Numbers (M/F)	Local Year	Basic Szs	Notes
Augustinians	20 (11/9)	2005	SZ1	PCV is SZ3
Seventy-Fours	50 (30/20)	2074	SZ3	nanotech
Psiders	17 (8/9)	2005	SZ3	psychic powers
Rocket Leaguers	15 (13/2)	1980	SZ2	variant humans; pulp-tech
Syria Planum Colonists	250 (xx/xx)	2100	SZ2	most technology is SZ1
Tin Soldiers	26 (14/12)	2065	SZ2	cybertech

Now What Do We Do?

Damage control: Repair any damage incurred before, during, or after contact with the Vortex; loot other grounded spacecraft or structures for spare parts.

Survival: Test the local life and environment, looking for fresh water, foodstuffs, and resources.

Exploration: Attempt to learn as much about this world and its inhabitants (willing and unwilling).

First contact: Form alliances with other groups.

Escape: Figure out a way to lift off, avoid the tractor beams and the golden moon, and sail back through the Vortex to home.

Colonize: Settle down and make Yrth 2 your own.

Some of the groups noted above will generally want to stay (Syria Planum Colonists), others desire to return home (Rocket Leaguers), and still others wish to leave and come back, perhaps with their oppressed brethren (Psiders) -- this provides conflicts internal and external to each group.

How Do We Get Back Home?

Unknown. Maybe your group has some crazy ideas to try. Maybe some other group knows.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

What Happened to Yrth 1?

Why would this planet be called Yrth 2? It's the third planet from its star -- there's a Mercury and a Venus analogue orbiting further inward. Why would anyone call their planet the second? Some options:

- 1. Planet named after Venus analog was discovered, but before Mercury analog.
- 2. Planet renamed after an apocalyptic war.
- 3. Planet is artificial.
- 4. Yrth 2 is actually the name of the Golden Moon.
- 5. Planet was colonized by beings from a "Yrth" located somewhere else.
- 6. Planet isn't just artificial, it's a computer simulation (and so are you!).
- 7. Something else.

No Magic!

As written, the universe that includes Yrth 2 is entirely *no mana* -- this means no magic works at all. While backfires on magical teleports or gate magic can lead *into* the Yrth 2 universe, they can't get you out.

(If a GM thinks this is too harsh, he or she can feel free to permit magic to work at SZ3, or temporarily "convert" magical ability into gadgeteering or psionic ability or inherent nanotech control.)

Gabrook 2?

The Rocket Leaguers call their home Earth "Gabrook." Whether this is the same Gabrook (centuries in the future, of course) that is the origin of the goblins in **GURPS Banestorm** or an "alternate Gabrook" is left up to the individual GM.

The History of Yrth 2, Part I

Millennia ago, the Precursors left Yrth 2. The servants of the Precursors worked as custodians of the planet, keeping it in good shape for the Precursors' possible future return. Time passed.

Solar flares. Asteroid impacts. Cosmic ray storms. The wear and tear of thousands of years. All of these factors led to hiccups, breakdowns, errors in programming, mutations in surface life.

The servants gained sapience. During their struggle to understand their new enlightenment, there were inevitable periods of conflict and cooperation. Empires rose and fell. And behind it all was the question that haunted all the servants: "What now?"

A great alliance of the servants came together at the site of the Precursors' Ascension. They attempted to use the Ascension Machine to contact their missing masters, to advise them of the changes on Yrth 2, and to request new instructions, given their altered state. Something went terribly wrong.

A titanic explosion annihilated the alliance, leaving only the outlier and renegade servants alive. The Ascension Machine was destroyed, along with a massive region of the mountain range where it was located. A desert grew in the fallout region. The planetary climate changed, and (possibly) reality itself fractured. The Science Zones began to fluctuate, and the Vortex appeared. The remaining servants fell upon each other, launching an intermittent state of war that lasts to this day.

And then the first victims of the Vortex began to land. . .

The Precursors

The Precursors were, if not human, sufficiently human-like such that their technology, infrastructure, and vehicles are all appropriately sized and ergonomic for humans. Otherwise, all that is known about them is they *left* Yrth 2 somehow, using the now-destroyed Ascension Machine.

Perhaps they force-evolved themselves into energy lifeforms, evacuated to a new dimension, blasted off in a colony ship, uploaded themselves into a gigantic computer (see below, *The Golden Moon*), or just died from some apocalyptic nanodisease.

LFOIs & RLOCs

The Yrth 2 Precursors left two types of artificial servant as caretakers of their planet: the LFOI and the RLOC.

LFOI (Light Form Optimized Intelligence)

LFOI are digital intelligences, resident in tiny, floating "light-bees" that can project their chosen image onto a nanofog. They have been charged with "gardening" duties -- protection, maintenance, information-gathering, and the study of biological life. They live in *crystal forests* -- giant shards of quartzium, shielded by spinning diamondoid canopies that convert sunlight, rain/dew, and blowing winds into electricity with a 99.8% efficiency.

LFOI do not age, but have a low level of "reproduction" -- the resources needed to create and repair light-bees are scarce and

hard to work. They can float, stretch, and partially pass through openings large enough to admit their nanofog (or fully, if the opening can permit the light-bee to pass), have 360 degree vision, and can fire a powerful defensive laser. They possess a wide-range of knowledge and theoretical understanding of the sciences, but they really shine at information management and biosciences. At SZ1, LFOIs are totally inert. At SZ2, they can operate, but their projected image is simply a hologram, unable to affect the physical world (all samples and work must be done by the light-bee itself). At SZ3, the nanofog projection can manipulate physical objects.

RLOC (Robotic Logical Operations Construct)

RLOC are robotic intelligences created to repair, maintain, demolish, and construct the physical structures and machines of Yrth 2 -- they are the Precursors' "mechanics." They "live" in *steel pits* -- underground installations full of machines and technologies.

RLOC age and suffer wear and tear, but have a high level of "reproduction" -- the resources needed to build new RLOCs are abundant and easy to work. They are strong, tough, and pack a wide-array of repair tools which can be used as weapons. While skilled at understanding technology and machines, they are often at a loss when dealing with biological life. At SZ1, RLOCs operate as complete hive-mind automatons. At SZ2+, they are fully sapient, individualized beings.

The Golden Moon

While the same size and mass, and in the same orbit as Earth's moon, this satellite is a gigantic, gold, gridded space station. It has ludicrously powerful weapons, though not quite to the level of planet-busting (consider it "the Death Star's kid brother"). Several of the following may be true about the Golden Moon:

- Inhabited by "weird" LFOIs, RLOCs, or both.
- Contains millions of cryo-storage units holding the Precursors.
- Moon's core is a gigantic computer holding the uploaded consciousnesses of the Precursors.
- Planetary defense system: shoots down big asteroids and invading fleets.
- Traffic control for surface-based tractor beams.
- Contains the Vortex Generator.
- Contains the Vortex Control Unit.

Science Zones?

Three possible justifications for the existence of the Science Zones are:

1. *Power Beams.* In areas where the broadcast power still operates, you get higher Science Zones.
2. *Junk/Countermeasure Nanotech.* The lower the Science Zone, the more "junk" or actively-hostile ambient nanotech there is, interfering with advanced technology.
3. *Underlying Code.* If the setting is all just a computer simulation, then -- simply -- certain classes of technology are contradicted.

See also below, *SZ Rules Suggestions* and *Eliminating SZs*.

PC Opportunities

Sure, players can generate characters from the groups listed above. But one of the benefits of the Yrth 2 setting is the ability to pick and choose characters from *other* favored science fiction settings and throw them all together. Ever want to see Sulu swordfighting with Skywalker? Jayne Cobb and Worf comparing weapons? Zarkov and Banzai collaborating on a supertech device? Maud'Dib and Severian having a Messiah-off? Determine if Kryten or C3PO would fight to the death to claim the title of "most irritating robot servant"? Yrth 2 is the place to be for these sorts of crossovers.

NPC Backgrounds

Each character below has their most important *strengths* (generally positive qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) and

weaknesses (generally negative qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) detailed. In descending order, the ranks are Master, Expert, Good, Average, and Poor. Depending upon the conception of what a character is like, any quality can be a strength or a weakness.

For example, suppose a character has "Spoiled Brat" as a quality. If it's ranked Average or above, it's a strength: the character always gets his own way, can wield undue influence by threatening to sic their Mommy or Daddy on others, might possess lots of cash or gadgets, and people may fawn over them, making life easy. But if the character has "Spoiled Brat (Poor)," this is a weakness: the character has led a pampered and sheltered life, rubs people the wrong way, and expects everyone to bend over backward to fulfill his most minor needs.

Since many game mechanics provide prose "benchmarks" to understand stat or skill levels, the ranked qualities below should be easily adaptable into any desired system. (Also see [the PDQ System](#) from [Atomic Sock Monkey Games](#).)

Professor Jennifer Sobolewski: Professor Sobolewski is an Expert Theoretical Physicist, a Good Outdoorswoman, and a Good Guitarist. While fascinated by the data collected on the Vortex (from its appearance through depositing the Project on Yrth 2), and intrigued by the new world she finds herself upon, she wishes to return to her home dimension greatly -- her husband and daughters are still there. Thus, she is Obsessed with Transdimensional Information (her Poor weakness): constantly seeking out stories, technologies, and "powers" related to interdimensional travel and the Vortex.

Captain John Quincy Remington, MD aka "Dr. Joker": The Chief Surgeon's nickname comes from his initials (JQR), and have possibly led to his greatest character flaw: Always Sarcastic (Poor). This tends to interfere with his bedside manner, despite his great medical skill (Master Nanosurgeon). Possessed of Good Pragmatism, he's looked upon by his other Seventy-Fours as a rock in the storm they find themselves in. Personally, he's happy to be out of the warzone, and has no problem remaining on Yrth 2.

Alice Gerald aka Prisoner #15317: Alice is an unregistered Telepath (Good) and Expert Freedom Fighter; she's also Stubborn As Hell (Poor). She works with her fellow ex-convicts -- and the ex-guards, if she has to -- to replicate the psi-drug that permitted one of her Jumper fellows to get to Yrth 2. But her goal is not simply to return home: she wants to go, grab more of her people, and jump back, where they can live free of the UNMD's control.

Commander Teve Torbz aka "The Space Devil": The command prowess of Teve Torbz is legendary (Master Spaceship Captain), leading to his nickname among space-pirates throughout Gabrookian Space. He's competent (Good) at most shipboard operations, is a noted Fencer (Expert) with the electro-vibro-sword, and seems to be blessed with the luck of the space gods (Good Daredevil). Unfortunately, he is a Point of a Romantic Rhombus (Poor) -- the other three apexes being the Plucky Girl Reporter, the Mad Scientist's Daughter, and the *GSS Jeljellek*. He is dedicated to getting his crew back to their home universe (and making a full report).

Eva Chang: Eva Chang is an Expert Welder, used to Operating Construction Exoskeletons (Good) for the good of the Syria Planum Colony; she is also trained as an Emergency Medic (Good). She is seeing a lovely young woman on the Colony Governor's staff named Belinda Jones, and is pleased as punch to be on a planet where you can walk outside without a protective suit of armor.

Sergeant Amit Patel aka "Tădua": Leader of the Heavy Fire Squad, Amit is a veteran cyber-soldier (Expert Tin Soldier; includes basic cyber package of dataports, comms, cyber-eye, and pharm-modules). His six Cyber-Tentacles have Good Super-Strength (enough to lift a jeep easily) and permit movement speeds of 80 mph over broken terrain. His Good Dermal Plating can turn up to medium caliber bullets with no problem. His favorite weapon is his Good Portable Railgun, which causes exciting amounts of property damage. His biggest flaw is his Need to Win (Poor), which often gets him and his men into trouble (both figurative and literal).

NPC Group Interaction Matrix

X	AUG	74	PSI	RL	SPC	TS	LFOI	RLOC
AUG	X	-	N	+	+	-	N	N
74	-	X	N	N	N	-	+	-
PSI	N	N	X	+	+	N	-	-
RL	+	N	+	X	N	N	-	-
SPC	+	N	+	N	X	N	-	+

TS	-	-	N	N	N	X	+	+
LFOI	N	+	-	-	-	+	X	-
RLOC	N	-	-	-	+	+	-	x

Key

AUG	=	Augustinians
74s	=	Seventy-Fours
PSI	=	Psiders
RL	=	Rocket Leaguers
SPC	=	Syria Planum Colonists
TS	=	Tin Soldiers
LFOI	=	Yrth2ling light beings
RLOC	=	Yrth2ling robots
+	=	Positive Reaction
-	=	Negative Reaction
N	=	No opinion
X	=	Null Value

Items & Locations

Ruins & Remnants

Any building blueprints or ship deckplans, suitably altered by damage, environment, Yrth 2 opportunists, or other castaways can provide exploratory fun. "Hey, look, Ma -- I found this mecha over in the Luddite Plains. Can I keep it?"

Steel Pits

Repurpose your old dungeons with metal plating, a coat of olive drab paint, and some flashing LEDs. Replace monsters with robots and goldpieces with powercells; keep the traps. Bingo.

Crystal Forests

If first encountered in an SZ1, these structures will simply look odd. However, if a mobile SZ2 drifts over it, the "trees" will start to glow. Some will open up slots and pour out small swarms of light-bees. Then the "ghosts" and "fairies" start appearing. If the SZ level increases to 3, then you've got a bunch of curious, potentially substantial AIs poking at you with probes and lasers, trying to learn all about you.

Surface Tractor Stations

In the past, surface tractor stations would be maintained by both LFOIs and RLOCs. Today, most of the stations have been taken over by a single type of servant. The interiors are honeycombed with power units, relays, focusing arrays, and suchlike.

The stations are directed by the Golden Moon, locking onto identified targets and drawing them down to landing pads or cradles as necessary. They are strong enough to pull just about any ship down at SZ3; in SZ2 conditions, they are weakened, and sturdy ships with strong engines might be able to break free. They do not operate within a SZ1, but their tractor beams can still *pass* through SZ1s and still weakly affect ships.

Best bet to escape their powers either to wait for a mobile SZ1 to blanket the station, or for a doughty group of heroes get in and Kenobi up the joint.

Events & Possible Story Arcs

Even if the player group doesn't attempt any of the ideas below, perhaps one

of the other groups will:

Scavenge: Plenty of ruins and wrecked ships to look through for replacements for a port compression coil catalyzer or damaged hyperspace motivator.

Disable Tractors: This is ridiculous. Even if you could take off, you'd never get past the tractor beam . . . unless some crazy old fossil takes it offline.

Avoid SZ flux: Then there needs to be some nimble piloting to avoid patches of varying Science Zone on the way to orbit.



Avoid the Golden Moon: Only a narrow window for take-off, while the Golden Moon hides its face, because if it detects your ship, it could activate a new tractor beam station . . . or open fire. Maybe the best way is to try to get aboard and reprogram the station to let you escape?

Enter Vortex or Make Own Way: Once clear of the Golden Moon, you've got to find the Vortex, summon it, or try some other method of interdimensional travel (slingshot around the sun, dive into a black hole, activate the Stargate, reverse the polarity on the whoosizwhatzit, whatever). Good luck (you're going to need it)!

Build an Empire or Society: Or you could just hang around, deal with or conquer the natives or other castaways, and try to make the best of this Brave New Yrth 2.

Early Period

This time period of the setting assumes that all groups of Vortex victims have recently landed, and are only just starting to figure out what happened. No alliances, no contact with each other, no contact with the natives, and no knowledge of the dangers of Yrth 2.

Late Period

This time period of the setting assumes that most or all groups of Vortex victims landed some time ago (six months or a year), and pursuing goals of colonization or escape. Most will have knowledge or experience of the dangers of Yrth 2. Some alliances or enmities have formed (use the *NPC Group Interaction Matrix* above for ideas) with other castaways or even natives.

We're Back!

The Precursors return. Hilarity ensues.

Are the post-humans sympathetic to the castaway groups? Or do they see them as new toys to play with? (Squire of Gothos, please use the white courtesy communicator located in the lobby!)

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Expressing the Dangers & Weirdness

Yrth 2 can be dangerous for the unprepared, and it might be a little unfair for a GM to spring a bunch of nanotech "gray goo" weapons on them unawares. Here are two methods for giving players an in-game heads-up on approaching dangers:

1. *Warning Shot*. A Warning Shot is a limited-effect example of a threat. Instead of a mob of giant cyber-kangaroos stampeding over the players' encampment, perhaps they see a single giant cyber-kangaroo bounding towards them, and the dust of the bigger herd on the horizon. This will give them time to prepare some sort of plan before being overrun.
2. *Sacrificial Redshirt*. A Sacrificial Redshirt is an NPC or group of NPCs (not necessarily associated with the PC group) that does something, or has something happen to them, which has a tragic effect. Perhaps another castaway ship attempts to take off without disabling the tractor beam: the PC group will be able to watch and learn from what happens to that ship.

Science Zoning

The Science Zones serve two purposes: to provide a rationale for having wildly variant levels of technology or ability from different science fictional universes under one framework, and to serve as an analogue to the mana levels of Yrth from *GURPS Banestorm*.

SZ Rules Suggestions

If a technology is operating in a SZ one level below its optimum, it works at a penalty. In *GURPS*, a reasonable penalty would be -5 to skill use; in *PDQ*, a Downshift (or even two) would be suitable. Adjust power costs, fuel consumption, areas of effect, malfunction possibility, or damage as appropriate.

Some technologies may work better at SZs higher than their optimum level. In *GURPS*, a reasonable bonus would be +5 to skill use; in *PDQ*, an Upshift would be suitable. Adjust power costs, fuel consumption, areas of effect, malfunction possibility, or damage as appropriate.

Eliminating SZs

Of course, if a GM finds the entire concept of SZs too silly for use, just ditch them. This means, of course, that those groups with more advanced technology or special abilities will be starkly more effective, more of the time -- some groups may have no real defenses against these technologies or abilities. Be warned!

Getting Silly

Slapping all kinds of science fiction tropes together willy-nilly may lead to silliness as the Jedi fight the Lensmen and the PsiCorps, the Blue-Handed Men join with the Men in Black, and HAL starts chatting up Holly. This might not be a bad thing, for the right group -- either as a "one-off" adventure episode or short-term campaign. Geeky fun!

If a GM and group wants to play Yrth 2 straight, then great care must be taken during character generation and campaign set-up. For example, if one is going to allow Scanners, one may not wish to eliminate a SZs limiting effect on psychic powers, or at least provide other methods of resisting the head-explodey.

In any case, Yrth 2 is what you make of it.

Other Resources

- [Book of the New Sun](#).
- [The Dying Earth](#).
- [Earth 2](#).
- [Girl Genius](#).
- [GURPS Banestorm](#).
- [Designers' Notes: GURPS Banestorm](#).
- [Red Dwarf](#).
- [Space/SF-related GURPS Books](#).
- [The Time Machine](#).

Maestros of the Red Sand

for *Transhuman Space*

by Eric Funk

As long as there have been nomads on Mars, there have been Romani among them. Still called "gypsies" by some, (although less commonly so because of the popularized "Gypsy Angels" in the Belt, see p. DB88), they travel the sands, trading live entertainment, news, and services for tools and supplies. Some call them "windies" or "wanderers," although these labels can also be applied to non-Trucker nomads. This situation has not changed that much away from the hustle and bustle of the urbanized Marinaris basin. The smaller communities are Isolate for different reasons, and are often supplied at irregular intervals. Between these colonies is where the Romani ply their trade, always in motion. Some plant trees and seeds wherever they make camp or vow to make minimal impacts on the environment. A few "windies" even vow never to visit the same port twice. All who choose to carry the name "Romani" hear the call of the open road.

Relations

Members of the Trucker's Guild get along splendidly with the wandering Romani, each group helping the other whenever they can (see p. ItW59). They help spread warnings and felicitations regarding people of note, thus they have a greater weight in the Martian Reputation network (see p. TM15). Interests rarely clash, and a few individuals purport to be of both groups. The Arab nomads have a cordial relationship with the Romani, as they are foremost merchants while the gypsies are primarily entertainers and craftsmen. From time to time the Romani have worked for favors from the Millionaires of Mars, passing word of areas that should be kept clear for duels, thus simplifying the work of security forces.

Ironically, the Romani now serve as a cultural link between the estranged European settlers on Mars (see p. ItW47). At each town, they share stories, language, and pass along hand-made items and artifacts as well as keeping up with the technical trades the EU citizens are famous for. Craft items include knitting, painted eggs, alcohol, and cheese. As long as the Romani obey local laws as they visit, the governments of Rust China and USA Mars tend to ignore them. Local law enforcement, on the other hand, often conducts "Customs Inspections" in conjunction with trusted Romani contacts to prevent smuggling, especially by those pretending to be Romani. Several Triad operations have been disrupted in this fashion. If it continues, then all Romani may soon gain an Enemy.

Tools

Mars Hawks are a common sight in Romani troupes, acting as stealthy scouts, as well as relays in hilly terrain (see p. ItW112). It's not unusual for Romani to wear Wearable (or have Implant) Virtual Interface units. Thus AI Allies/Dependants are also common. Beyond that, they often have access to most of the Expedition gear from pp. TS 151-153.

Many use variants of the Martian Heavy Rover (see p. ItW101) with solar panels (28kW on Mars, see p. ItW134) to travel continuously during the day at about 20 mph, or to move at full speed at improved fuel efficiency. These solar cells can recharge the power cells in 2.8 hours when parked. Some vehicles sport short-range lasercomms on the sensor turrets for private communication.

Martian Romani Template [75 points]

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

Primary Advantages: Andraste [14], Charisma +1¹ [0], Cultural Adaptability [15], Eidetic Memory 1² [9], Language Talent +2¹ [0], Musical Ability +1 [1], and 10 cp in Absolute Direction [5], Absolute Timing [5], Appearance [varies], Charisma [5/level], Fashion Sense [5], Improved Eidetic Memory [+9], Pious [5], or Voice [10].

Background Advantages: Ally [varies], Ally Group (Romani) [varies], Contact [varies], Patron (Romani Troupe) [varies], Reputation [varies].

Primary Disadvantages: Congenial [-1], Discipline of Faith (Romani) [-5], Dreamer [-1], and Xenophilia [-5], and -10cp in Attentive [-1], Compulsion [varies], Curious [varies], Extravagance [-10], Imaginative [-1], increased Chummy [by -4], Gregarious [by -9], or Xenophilia (Strong) [by -10], Vow [varies].

Background Disadvantages: Dependent [varies], Enemy [varies], Reduced Wealth [varies], Reputation [varies].

Primary Skills: Bard M/A IQ [2], Bardic Lore M/H IQ-2 [1], Merchant M/A IQ¹ [1], Pop Culture (Mars) M/A IQ-1¹ [1] (see p. BD125), and 2cp in performance skills such as Filch (P/A), Fire Eating (P/A), Fortune Telling (M/A), Juggling (P/E), Musical Instrument³ (M/H), Performance¹ (M/A), Poetry (M/A), and Sleight of Hand (P/H).

Secondary Skills: Acting M/A IQ¹ [1], Area Knowledge (various) M/E IQ+1¹ [1], Area Knowledge (various) M/E IQ+1¹ [1], Orienteering M/A IQ-2 [1/2], Survival (Martian Plains) M/A IQ-2 [1/2], and 1/2cp in one of Mechanic (Specialization) (M/A) or Animal Handling (general or Mars Hawk) (M/H).

Background Skills: Philosophy (Romani) M/H IQ-3 [1/2], and 1cp in unarmed skill(s), such as Karate (P/H), Judo (P/H), Boxing (P/A), or Brawling (P/E), 1cp in ranged weapon skill(s) such as Guns (P/E) or Beam Weapons (Electrolaser) (P/E), and 1cp in improving these skills, or in a melee skill such as Short Staff (P/H), Knife (P/E) or Tonfa (P/H).

Cinematic Skills (B175): Detective! or Music!.

Languages¹: Cantonese M/A IQ+1 [1], English M/A IQ+1 [1], Romani (native) IQ+2 [0], and 1cp in one or two other Language(s).

¹ Includes bonus for Cultural Adaptability

² Historically Learnable, see p. F128 (4e)

³ Includes bonus for Musical Ability

Example Character:

Piedro Momiji a.k.a. "The Maestro of the Sands" [100 points]

If one were to enter any small Martian town and ask the local entertaining community about "an old Romani," they will know someone like that. No one will know exactly when the wanderer arrived on Mars, but it has been a long time. Some say that he served in a military, while others claim that he was part of a relief force. All agree that such a man as Piedro has a good sense of humor; he is difficult to anger. As a guest, he will eat any food presented to him, as long as the hosts eat the same food without needing biomods. His watch and assorted scars have various tales regarding how he acquired them (some conflicting, but all are entertaining and educational). Unfortunately, his old age is catching up to him, starting with his fortitude and hearing, although the latter is still as acute as an ordinary man's. His nanomods are gifts from just a few of the people whose lives he has touched over the decades. His NAI, "Bastien," has been in his VIG for years, and can play accompaniment if needed, but is otherwise mute. It is an evolved "CG Faraday" (see p. PF57), with Music and First Aid skills instead of Piloting and Sensor skills.

The Truth: Growing up in China as the only child of European parents, Piedro was exposed to a number of cultures as they were moving from city to city. He became an outspoken student during the time when Mars was seen as a penal colony. After arriving on the Red Planet, he set out away from Chinese territory and discovered he liked to

travel. As such, he has never returned to the Chinese cities of New Shanghai and Haiyuan. Although his Andraste biomod was not of his own choice, the freedom it brings is cherished by his people.

Quotes: "I'm getting too old for this sort of thing."

"*That* is a story that began a long time ago, on a planet far, far away . . ."

"In the light of the many moons man hath wrought and afix'd in the heavens . . ."

"*Real* communication is done in person!"

Piedro appears as an older man with tied-back shoulder-length gray hair, and a well-trimmed beard (both often stained with Mars-dust). He usually wears a bardic tunic, baggy pants, two golden ear rings, and carries a silver pocket watch (Mars time) in his breast pocket and a smile on his face.

Information is in Mars units; Terran units are in parentheses.

Apparent Age (years): ~32 (60)

Approximate Age (years): ~43 (80)

Height: 5'11"

Weight (lbs): 57 (150)

Race: Human, European, mixed.

Handedness: Left

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 9 [-10].

Dmg: 1d (thr), 1d+1 (sw) (Boxing); Speed 5.25; Move 8 (5) (See p. ItW 33); Dodge 5/6 from Boxing; Parry 8 (Boxing).

Advantages:

Ally (AI, Bastien, Always, 75cp) [0]

Charisma +2³ [5]

Cultural Adaptability [15]

Eidetic Memory 1 [9]

Independent Income (Music Royalties) [5]

Language Talent +3³ [2]

Musical Ability +3 [3]

Reputation (Wise and Honest +3, Small Class, Always) [5]

Reputation (Good Musician +2, Large Class, Sometimes) [3]

Voice [10].

Disadvantages:

Bad Back [-25]

Delusion (Not hard of hearing) [-5]

Discipline of Faith (Romani Tradition) [-5]

Hard of Hearing [-10]

Secret (Exile) [-5]

Skinny [-5]

Xenophilia (Strong) [-15].

Quirks:

Attentive

Imaginative

Responsive

Removes ear rings before a fight

Tries to avoid real-time electronic communication [-5].

Biomods:

Andraste (\$14,000) [14]
Liver Upgrade (\$10,000) [10]
Tetrachromatism (\$500, see p. ItW 99) [0].
Nanomods (see p. TS165):
Artery Cleaners (\$5,000) [0]
Carcinophages (\$7,500) [3]
DNA Repair (\$10,000) [4]
Immune Machines 2 (\$5,000) [5]
Pore Cleaners (\$500) [0]
Tooth Cleaner (\$1,000) [0].

Skills:

Acting-12³ M/A [1]
Animal Handling-11 M/H [1]
Animal Handling (Mars Goat)-15/9 M/H [1/2]
Animal Handling (Mars Hawk)-15/9 M/H [1/2]
Appreciate Beauty (Music)-16/10³ M/V [1]
Area Knowledge (Marinaris)-13³ M/E [1/2]
Area Knowledge (Martian Outback)-15³ M/E [2]
Area Knowledge (Sinai)-14³ M/E [1]
Area Knowledge (Xanthe)-14³ M/E [1]
Bard-16^{3,6} M/A [2]
Bardic Lore-11 M/H IQ-1 [1]
Beam Weapons (Electrolaser)-14¹ P/E [1]
Boating (Powerboat)-10 P/A [1/2]
Body Language-9 M/H [1/2]
Boxing-12 P/A [2]
Carousing-9³ M/A (HT) [2]
Computer Operation-13 M/E [1]
Conducting-15⁵ M/A [1]
Dancing-12 P/A [2]
Detect Lies-11 M/H [1]
Diplomacy-15^{2,3,6} M/H [1/2]
Driving (Automobile)-12 P/E [1]
Fast-Draw (dual remove ear rings)-13 P/E [2]
First Aid-12 M/E [1/2]
Gambling-13³ M/A [1]
Games (LARP)-13 M/E [1/2]
Guns (Pistol)-13¹ P/E [1/2]
Heraldry (Martian Travel)-11⁷ M/A [1/2]
Holdout-11 M/A [1/2]
Lip Reading-12 M/A [1]
Merchant-14³ M/A [2]
Musical Composition-14⁵ M/H [1/2]
Musical Instrument (Flute)-15⁵ M/H [1]
Musical Instrument (Guitar)-14⁵ M/H [1/2]
Musical Instrument (Lute)-14⁵ M/H [1/2]
Musical Instrument (Piano)-14⁵ M/H [1/2]

Musical Instrument (Violin)-16⁵ M/H [2]
 Naturalist (Mars)-11 M/H [1]
 Orienteering-12 M/A [1]
 Performance-17^{2,3,6} M/H [2]
 Philosophy (Aeromancy)-10 M/H [1/2]
 Philosophy (Romani)-12 M/H [2]
 Poetry-11 M/A [1/2]
 Pop Culture (Mars)-14³ M/A [2]
 Savoir-Faire-16^{3,6} M/E [1]
 Singing-16^{5,6} (HT) P/E [2]
 Streetwise-12 M/A [1]
 Survival (Mars, Desert)-11 M/A [1/2]
 Survival (Mars, Plains)-12 M/A [1]
 Swimming-10 P/E [1/2]
 Teaching-13³ M/A [1].

Languages⁴:

Cantonese-15 M/A [1]
 English-15 M/A [1]
 Japanese-14 M/A [1/2]
 Mandarin-14 M/A [1/2]
 Romani (Native) 16 [0]
 Spanish-14 M/A [1/2].

¹ Includes +2 for IQ

² Includes +2 for Charisma

³ Includes +1 for Cultural Adaptability (other than ² and ⁴)

⁴ Includes +3 for Language Talent

⁵ Includes +3 for Music Ability

⁶ Includes +2 for Voice

⁷ Does *not* include +1 from Tetrachromatism (e.g. for sigils designed by others with this biomod.)

Equipment: Distributed Virtual Interface Glasses with integral compass, GPS, and Teleview ×4 (0.2 lbs, \$2,100), Medkit (1 lb, \$150), Musical Instruments, hand-made or custom 3D printer models: flutes, a guitar, and a violin.

Adventure Seeds

"So You Need a Guide?": They have a basic map to a "Martian temple"/lost mine/crashed ship/meteorite. They need a vehicle to get there and going to a normal rental agency will attract unwanted attention.

For a Song: An old man with a kindly face has been asking about the group. The adventurers have a reputation for accomplishing just the thing he needs solved. In fact, he seems to know a lot of information about the abilities and resources of the group, and has a job that requires all their talents . . .

Guanxi: The old man's violin is broken on a PC's behalf (perhaps to save him from a mugger), and now a debt is owed, which can be repaid by finding him a new one . . . (see p. ItW 40)

These are not the (Corporate) Drones You're Looking For: PCs need to sneak through an area undetected, and what better way is there than disguised as Gypsies? In order for the Romani to honestly be able to vouch for them as "brothers," they will need to try to fit in early in the trip . . .

Lost and Found: The PCs are looking for someone, and the "wandering Gypsy" may have seen him, but the potential informant has already left. Once tracked down, he has only heard about him in the previous port of call, but knows someone *two* ports ago that had seen him . . . Of course, he/she/it doesn't have a phone number.

Map Quest: The adventurers are hired to chart an area to look for minerals, a lost base, or Ares Conspiracy factory. This old man has actually been there!

Horse Races? Due to the interference of the heroes, a Romani is hurt during a juggling competition, and can no longer race. One PC must go on in that performer's stead . . .

Persecuted?: A Mars Development Corps security force is leaning on a youth, but the troupe has medical supplies needed in a remote community. The heroes are asked to be in one of two places. They could wait for him to be released, and then catch up to the Troupe. The other alternative is a breakneck race across the Martian wilderness to a volatile, quarantined Isolate community.

The Show Must Go On: The Romani are hosting a benefit concert in a medium-sized settlement. The problem is that someone is trying to spoil the fun. While all the actors are performing (or otherwise occupied in the project), someone is setting fires and sabotaging equipment. So far no one has been hurt, but Piedro asks the PCs to find out who, and why. He hints that it would be appreciated if the culprit could be given to them to turn over to the authorities . . .

The Wrath of the Collector: The party is contracted to persuade a "crazy old man" to part with an antique violin, in any way that does not damage the instrument . . .

What the collector neglected to mention is that there are other bounty hunter teams after the violin. Their employers are all seeking a microchip that was secretly planted in it.

Variants

Horror: Add Hidden Lore-12 M/H [2], Occultism-12 M/H [2], and Scrounging-12 M/A [1], add perhaps Unattractive [-5] and this man could be a source of information on the weirdness. If magic is available, consider the Ritual Magic paths of Knowledge, Dreams, Nature, and/or Luck.

Pulp: Replace the rovers with large (ex-military?) trucks, and change the transhuman skills to 1920s skills such as Languages, Accounting and Conspiracy Theory.

Western: A memorably sight in an Old West campaign may be cowboys encountering a colorfully painted horse (or camel)-driven wagon. Convert as per Pulp, swapping vehicle skills for Packing, Animal Handling (specialty), Veterinarian, and Teamster.

Fantasy: As above, but convert Guns to Crossbow.

Space: Fusion-powered FTL and total Life support systems mean that travelers no longer need raw resources to survive. On the other extreme, the Romani may well have ships of the smallest FTL configuration possible, so they could *live* anywhere they wanted to.

Links

Pyramid

- [Case of the Unlucky Stradivarius](#)" by Jeff Siadek
- [Circus Maximus](#)" by Stephen Dedman
- Fields of Mars (link to <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/login/article.html?id=542>) (with deck plans) by James L. Cambias

- "Hummer" (link to <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/login/article.html?id=3105>) by Kenneth Peters
- The Musical Clue(link to <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/login/article.html?id=4892>) by David Morgan-Mar
- Noctis Labyrinthus(link to <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/login/article.html?id=2893>) (DN: Mars) by James L. Cambias
- Transhuman Martial Arts(link to <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/login/article.html?id=4582>) by Peter V. Dell'Orto & Werner H. Hartmann

Links

- A Decorated Bus (link to <http://www.asienhaus.org/galerie/lkws/english/lkw.htm>)
- Evil Dr. Ganymede's Transhuman Mars Maps (link to <http://www.evildrganymede.net/rpg/ths/ths.htm>) (Touted as more up to date than In The Well.)
- Timeline of Romani History 400BC to 1997 (link to <http://www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/timeline.htm>)
- Romani History(link to <http://www.romani.org/local/romhist.html>)

Media

- *Total Recall*

The Republic of Sealand

by S. E. Mortimer

E Mare Libertas -- From the Sea, Freedom.

Welcome to Europe's smallest nation: a decommissioned World War II gun platform off the east coast of England.

Introduction

Sitting in the North Sea -- seven nautical miles off the east coast of England -- is one of the world's most successful micronations. The Principality of Sealand was originally one of a series of anti-aircraft platforms constructed by Britain to help ward off German airstrikes during World War II. After the War, British authorities abandoned the platforms. One of these was known as "Roughs Tower" located northeast of London and opposite the mouth of the Orwell River and Felixstowe. Being positioned around seven nautical miles off England's coast, it was more than three miles outside of Britain's territorial waters at the time, but is today within the 12 nautical mile range claimed by Britain in 1987. As such its existence as an independent sovereign nation is uncertain.

History

In 1967, former English major Paddy Roy Bates -- a pirate radio broadcaster and owner of a fleet of fishing boats -- occupied the platform and settled there with his family. Two years previously he considered the site as a base for his pirate radio station, but when Britain legalized commercial radio, Bates thought he could make money by creating his own principality. He proclaimed Roughs Tower an island state and renamed it the Principality of Sealand. In the same year the British government sent out a demolition team to dismantle the only other surviving platform (known as HMF Sunk Head) to prevent anyone else who might be considering "secession." The explosion could be seen by the Bates family six miles away on Sealand.

In 1968 a buoy repair boat came too close to the platform and Roy's son, Michael, fired warning shots from the tower. The British government promptly charged Prince Roy and Michael with unlawful possession and discharge of a firearm. The Essex Crown Court ruled that it didn't have jurisdiction over the platform since it was outside of Britain's three-mile territorial limit. The British government chose to drop the case because of unfavorable media attention, and the Prince took this as tacit recognition of Sealand's independent status. Within seven years he had developed a constitution, a national flag and anthem, and issued passports, vehicle license plates, postage stamps, coinage, etc. The Sealand Dollar was fixed to \$1US.

Coup De Tat

In 1977 a group of German and Dutch lawyers and diamond merchants approached Prince Roy about buying the platform. While Roy and his wife waited in Austria to meet the consortium, A German with a Sealand passport named Gernot Putz, along with some Dutch mercenaries, invaded the platform and overpowered Michael. He was held hostage onboard for three days, after which time Michael was abandoned in Holland. When he met up with his parents, he helped his father organize a counter-attack. They enlisted a pilot friend with a helicopter along with some "hired guns." The men abseiled down at dawn onto the platform, with Michael in the lead, and the confused Dutchmen surrendered after Michael fired a shot from his shotgun. The Dutchmen were released but Putz was imprisoned and charged with treason (because he was a Sealand citizen). It took the personal visit from a German diplomat to secure the man's release.

Sealand claims Putz admitted to selling over 150,000 fake Sealand passports, which have been used for illegal activities such as opening money-laundering bank accounts. One incident involved the FBI investigation into the

murder of fashion mogul Gianni Versace in 1997. The killer, Andrew Cunanan, committed suicide on the Miami houseboat of an accomplice -- both men had fake Sealand passports. The boat owner apparently had been driving around Los Angeles with Sealand "diplomatic plates" on his car. In 1999 Spanish police busted a Madrid-based gang tied to international drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and money laundering. The gang was using a fake Sealand web site and thousands of fake Sealand passports to hide its criminal activity. Another scam involved selling fake passports to Hong Kong nationals who wished to leave during the Chinese takeover.

HavenCo Ltd

In June 2000 an Anguillan-based company called HavenCo announced plans to locate its servers and satellite uplinks on the Sealand platform. The purpose of this was to allow companies using its servers to avoid the government scrutiny which would have been made possible with the introduction of new laws in countries such as Britain and the United States. In 2001, once it validated the platform's independent status, it leased floorspace in Sealand's south tower, installed a million dollars worth of equipment, and set up business as an Internet collocation service.

Some of HavenCo's clients include banks and financial institutions with sensitive clients who need a secure, untraceable transaction system, R&D companies who need a secure place to store their research, and businesses who have sensitive personnel files. HavenCo's website notes that they provide "unsurpassed physical security from the world, including government subpoenas and search and seizures of equipment and data." HavenCo uses tamper-resistant hardware and cryptography to maximize security and it has vowed to destroy the servers as a last resort if someone tries to take Sealand by force, thus guaranteeing the security of its clients' data. The company claims that it keeps a close eye on its servers and if any suspicious transactions took place, HavenCo would investigate, remove offending data, and cancel breached contracts if required.

The platform is connected to the wider world through microwave, satellite, and fiber-optic links to London's Telehouse and the Amsterdam Internet Exchange. It is believed that the lower levels of the south tower contain nothing but computer equipment and air conditioners, powered by a triple-redundant backup generator system. These levels are sealed in a near-pure nitrogen atmosphere. This virtually oxygen-free environment serves three purposes: to reduce the risk of fire; to prevent intruders; and to inhibit corrosion, which is exacerbated by the proximity to sea salt.

The "Island"

Originally known as "His Majesty's Fort (HMF) Roughs," it was a reinforced concrete pontoon measuring 168 feet by 88 feet, supported by two hollow 35-foot-diameter towers. These were mounted on a "boat shaped" base 214 feet deep, 168 feet long, and 88 feet wide. It was constructed at Gravesend in 1940 and towed to Tilbury for outfitting. About 100 men were assigned to it before deployment. In 1942 it was towed out seven nautical miles to the Rough Sands sandbar and sunk so that only the towers and platform were visible above water. The two hollow towers were divided into seven floors, some of which were underwater, for storage and accommodation. A steel framework at one end of the platform supported a landing jetty and crane which was used to hoist supplies and crewmembers aboard. The platform also had a gundeck, armed with two 4.5" guns; an upper deck, armed with four Lewis machine guns and two Bofors 40mm gun; and a central tower containing radar equipment with a radar dish on top. It was not a popular post and could be difficult and expensive to provision. By 1946 the Royal Navy had abandoned Roughs Tower.

Today the platform is in use again, and a new crane hauls people and supplies onboard (a journey of about 60 feet straight up). A long thin communications antennae is mounted to the helipad (the upper deck) and on the rusting deck below are scattered oil and fuel drums, gas canisters, and disused equipment that might one day be salvaged. The helipad is the roof of a low building which contains several cabins on either side of a long central passageway called "the Run." The Sealand Post Office is at the end of this passage. All interiors are of riveted steel panels covered with many layers of white paint. There are four large diesel generators onboard but only one is needed to supply power to the entire platform. The other three are for backup purposes to ensure that there is never a power outage. Battery backup can power the platform for five minutes or so -- long enough to start up an alternative generator should one fail.

Each of the seven levels in the two towers is around 35 feet in diameter and is surprisingly dry and comfortable, though the sea can be heard surging against the other side of the wall. The north tower houses guest quarters, a brig, and a conference room. The south tower contains the "stateroom" on the top level with an office and racks of computers, but the lower levels are restricted to personnel authorized by HavenCo and contain their offshore "data haven." The weekly 45-mile supply run starts from the town of Southend-on-Sea at 4:30 am. With the increased activity there is also a regular ferry service to the platform; however, because of the sensitive operations of HavenCo, it is difficult to get authorization to visit. It takes several hours to traverse the water by boat, but by helicopter it is only a 15-minute trip. Employees are rotated on a two-week basis -- two weeks onboard followed by two weeks ashore in Britain. There have been around 300 legitimate passports issued by Sealand but only a little over a dozen people are onboard at any one time, including around six HavenCo employees and a contracted security force of four heavily armed men (with access to weapons including 50-caliber heavy machine guns, 5.56mm automatic rifles, and 12-gauge shotguns). One guard is usually on duty at the entrance to the south tower to prevent unauthorized access to HavenCo's servers. Sealand's current Chief of Security is Alan Beale. Alan and his security team also double as a maintenance crew, carrying out most of the day-to-day upkeep of the platform.

Despite the coup in 1977, security isn't considered likely to be compromised these days. The guards would be able to prevent an unauthorized helicopter from landing, and the only other way to gain access is to scale one of the towers from the sea. An extremely difficult undertaking because of the way the platform overhangs. And the British government, however much it might like to see Sealand disappear, would be unwilling to permit a foreign power or terrorist organization to mount an attack so close to its shores.

Sealand has a national football team, based in Denmark. Today Prince Roy is 83 years old and has retired in Spain. His son and heir apparent, Prince Michael, takes care of the daily business of running the principality. At only around 30 feet, the water depth is quite shallow on the Rough Sandbar. In the future, Bates has plans for extending Sealand into a man-made island with space for banks, its own airport, and possibly a hotel and casino complex.

Hazards

It is frequently very windy around Sealand, making it dangerous for helicopters to land; people being winched aboard have been known to have been swung so wildly that they have slammed into the side of the tower. It could also be a shipping hazard, especially during rough weather. In the early 1960s another platform known as Shivering Sands was struck by a ship, causing one of its towers to collapse, killing four people (at the time, the platform was being used as a pirate radio station known as Radio City). Also, being located in the middle of the sea and made of metal, the platform is a natural lightning conductor. There have been no fatalities, so far . . .

Legal Status

Despite the extension of Britain's territorial waters to 12 miles in 1987, international law does not allow the claiming of new land during the extension of sea rights; thus, according to this argument, Sealand is still a sovereign nation. Even so, neither the United Kingdom nor the United States officially recognize Sealand as an independent nation. However, there is some precedent for the claim of sovereignty. In a subsequent firearms incident in 1990 the British government refused to pursue the matter despite clear violations of Britain's harsh firearms legislation. In a separate ruling by the British Department of Health and Social Security, the Bates are not required to pay health insurance during the time they reside on Sealand. Each time a foreign country stamps a Sealand passport it is giving tacit recognition of the validity of those passports. Also, in the attempted coup described above, the British government refused to become involved citing the Essex court ruling as a reason. In addition, the German government, in de facto recognition of Sealand's sovereignty, sent a diplomat directly to Sealand to negotiate the release of its citizen.

Roleplaying Ideas

From 1942 till the end of World War II, Roughs Tower was an integral component of Britain's artillery defense against German air raids. In a WWII campaign, characters may be part of the 100 member contingent of Royal Navy sailors

assigned to the platform. Roughs Tower was the first sea fort of its kind and its primary mission was to look out for German submarines and aircraft.

Between the abandonment by the Royal Navy in 1946 and the occupation by Bates in 1967, Roughs Tower was deserted. It would have made an ideal hideout for a gang who were hiding from the authorities, or as a base for low-profile criminal activity.

After the occupation by Prince Roy, Sealand is declared a sovereign nation. Perhaps the PCs are the team of mercenaries hired by Bates to take back his country after the attempted coup in 1978. Perhaps the PCs are members of an IT company interested in using the services of HavenCo to escape the scrutiny of the authorities of other nations. Perhaps the PCs are hired to try and infiltrate Sealand and discover what HavenCo is hiding on its servers.

If Prince Michael successfully establishes his proposed man-made island extension, there would be plenty of opportunities for entrepreneurial characters to take advantage of a state in the early stages of expansion.

What would happen if a government wanted to extradite one of HavenCo's employees for criminal activity before he joined HavenCo? Would Sealand turn him over or would the state resist the extradition? What action would that government take if Sealand ignored the extradition request?

Perhaps when the British Navy came out to dismantle the second remaining platform (HMF Sunk Head) in 1967 they found it already occupied -- possibly by the PCs. Today that platform might be operating in cooperation with Sealand or it may be a direct competitor.

Additional Reading

- Official Government Site -- <http://www.sealandgov.org/index.html>
- Official site of HavenCo -- <http://www.havenco.com/>
- Sealand Homepage -- <http://www.fruitsofthesea.demon.co.uk/sealand/index.html>
- Maunsell Sea Forts -- <http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/mongsoft/forts.htm>
- Wired article on HavenCo -- <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.07/haven.html>
- Photos -- <http://kim.nyclondon.com/sealand.html>
- Micronationalism:
 - <http://www.angelfire.com/nv/micronations/>
 - <http://www.unet.univie.ac.at/~a0102122/miscellaneous/admicnat.htm>
 - <http://www.zenzibar.com/Articles/ed-6-25.htm>

Birth is a Life Sentence

In honor of last week's Talk Like a Pirate Day, riddle me this, Batman!

What does the classic Sid Meier computer game *Pirates!* have to do with my commute to work last week?

Errr . . . besides my longing to draw my cutlass, hop from stopped car to stopped car, and sever the heads of idiot drivers who so richly deserve it? Oh, and take their loot, too?

Well, let me back up a minute. I got my first temp assignment this past week. Now, as I left to drive to my assignment (which sparked another random thought, which I hope to write about for next week's column), I departed with what I thought was plenty of time to get there -- MapQuest said it'd take 16 minutes to drive the 11 miles, so I left 46 minutes early.

So when I got to my destination 15 minutes late, I was displeased. I was in my car for over an hour, resulting in an average speed of just over five miles per hour . . . a speed I can equal or exceed while walking on my hands. And as I felt some of my first flushes of what I can only assume to be road rage (or else the high-strung bacony blood that's claimed the lives of every Marsh for the past three generations), I realized: I don't have time for this.

And as I got home at 6pm, I realized . . . I *really* don't have time for this. Between the mandatory one-hour lunch (where it's hard to do anything useful except stand against a cubical wall, regenerate, and plot revenge against the Doctor) and the hour there and back, my eight-hour shift is an 11-hour extravaganza. In doing the flashbacks, I realized I'd never had to commute before, at least any distances longer than a mile or two. (Long-time readers may have pieced together that I only learned to drive in the past few years -- inspiring at least [one article](#).) The notion of losing an hour or two is troubling to me, let alone losing an hour or two a *day*.

Of course, there isn't much room for me to whine. After all, as I understand it, people in the real world do this every day. But -- and here's what's getting my goat -- the way my life is structured, I can't afford to lose that 10-15 hours a week. Heck, those hours could easily form the bulk of my budgeted *Pyramid* time, let alone any other office aid I'd want to do, freelance writing, playing on the computer . . . oh, yeah, and did I mention I'm [married](#)?

So what does this have to do with *Pirates!*? Simply put, quite possibly the greatest challenge an intermediate-to-experienced player of *Pirates!* has is the lack of time a seafaring swashbuckler has. As the pirate gets older, his abilities slow down, putting him at greater danger for a cutlass to the chest. After a long enough career, he will eventually be forced to retire due to advanced age and poor health. As best as I can remember, you never actually "die" per se in *Pirates!*. Rather, if your ship sinks you wash up on an island, only to be rescued months later; if you lose in a sword fight against a pirate-hunting privateer, you might spend months in jail. And so on.

This arrangement can serve as a good model for GMs and players alike . . . especially since many gaming groups are at least halfway there, already. See, most gaming groups I've run or been a part of have had a reluctance to kill off PCs trivially. Since I do this in my own groups, it stands to reason that it's something I believe in and support. And that'd be right. But it can be challenging to keep the excitement level up, since the players might come to believe that nothing holds any significant danger for their characters. But it's quite possible to turn that assumption on its ear; sure, you won't die now, but a hero only lives so long . . .

I've talked about time as a commodity previously, but only in the micro sense: You have X number of hours in town/at the headquarters/in downtime; what do you do with it? But time can be an excellent macro motivator, too. And, unlike the real world where we never know how much time we have left, it's even possible to let players know the expected lifespan of their characters, or the campaign: "This series will span 30 years, beginning with you all as young heroes and ending with your retirement (forced or otherwise)." In fact, I've even taken this to an extreme myself, such as my article for *d20 Weekly* called ["The Last Year Of Your Lives."](#)

Such a scheme might even inspire a bit of competition among the players; if a campaign has a definite length -- and a

predefined ending -- then players might be a bit more ambitious. (It worked for the comic strip Cerebus; everyone knew he was gonna die for decades . . .)

To quote *Fight Club*, on a long enough timeline, everyone's survivability drops to zero. And the length of that line is finite and, in most ways, more irreplaceable and precious than gold or other markers. Treating it like a precious commodity -- the ultimate nonrenewable resource -- may add more spice to a game than any mere atomic-breathed towering cyber-dragon.

Just be wary in such a system if all the players start gravitating toward elves or similarly long-lived species . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

Pyramid Review

Enemy Gods: A Little Game Of Big Powers

Published by [Wicked Dead Brewing Company](#)

Written by John Wick

60-page 5.5"×8.5" spiral-bound softcover; \$12

0.8 MEG PDF Document; \$6

Games in which you play gods or beings of that degree of power are nothing new, including [Panthreon and Other Roleplaying Games](#), [Nobilis](#), [Primal Order](#), and [ARIA: Canticle of the Monomyth](#). The newest entry to this little pantheon of titles is ***Enemy Gods: A Little Game Of Big Powers***, an RPG in which a player not only takes on the role of a god, but a hero as well. Designed by John Wick (responsible for [Legend of the Five Rings](#), [7th Sea](#), and [Orkworld](#)), this is a game of heroic fantasy in the mold of Ancient Greece, and the works of Michael Moorcock and Robert E. Howard. Mere mortals are capable of doing great things, but only with the divine favor of the deity or deities that they worship.

In game terms this concept is deftly executed by having each hero empowering the gods through his Devotions. In turn, the gods can grant their faithful the ability to perform amazing, even heroic feats, as well as Blessings and Miracles. Yet beware a god's wrath, as he can curse or smite a wayward hero, perhaps for not showing enough deference, or for the hero relying too much upon his own abilities, or just because. gods are like that.

Thus a player has to create two characters -- his god and his hero. Gods can be assigned by the GM, randomly or by design, either from the pantheon described in the first of ***Enemy gods'*** four appendices, or from an existing pantheon, such as the Greek or Norse. Alternatively, a GM can create his own family of gods. The GM controls any god not selected by the players.

A little more thought goes into a player's hero, as he is not your average adventurer. Touched by the gods he is destined for greatness and has already set out on that path. In terms of background a player needs to read through the game's quick version of Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Adventure* cycle and then play the game of 20 questions. In game terms a player distributes seven points between his Hero's Backgrounds and divides 10 points between his devotions. Backgrounds represent skills, talents, and experiences, while Devotions represent the bonus dice that can be called upon if a hero's action falls within the purview of a God's Domain. Thus in a duel, a hero will implore the God of the Battlefield for his aid, whilst he will turn to the Goddess of Love to help him seduce a barmaid. A hero also begins the game with two points of Hubris as well as a suitably heroic flaw. Thus a rough sailor who has seen off a pirate attack or two, and has a girl in nearly every port would have the Backgrounds of Sailor: 3, Spearman: 2, Ruggedly Handsome: 2. He has the Devotions of Battlefield: 2, Craft: 2, Fortune: 3, Hearth: 1, Justice: 2, Love: 3, and Wisdom: 4. He also has Hubris: 2, and his Flaw is "Called to the Sea," and thus cannot settle.

Instead of a Task Resolution System, ***Enemy Gods*** calls its mechanics "Taking Risks." Simply a player rolls a number of six-sided dice equal to his Hero's Background plus his Hubris or appropriate Devotion, plus any Advantage Dice. Even results on the dice count towards a set Target Number from Easy (Difficulty 1) to Mythic (Difficulty 8). If the action falls into the Domain of a god, the hero's player turns to the god's player and asks for his aid. If the god agrees, the hero can roll an extra number of dice equal or up to the Devotion rating he has for the god in question. It is down to the god to decide just how many dice he can roll. If the hero relies upon his own abilities and eschews the favor of the gods, he rolls a number of dice equal to his Hubris. Doing this can incur the displeasure of the gods.

Advantage Dice are bonuses awarded for player initiative, input, and good roleplaying. In any situation a player

describes any elements that might give his hero an edge. Each advantage accepted by the GM gains the player an extra die. For example, our sailor from above has chased down a pirate ship and jumps aboard to attack. His player suggests that his hero has three advantages: One for leaping down into the pirate's boat, a second for wielding a long spear, and a third because the Sun is behind him. Combat works in the same fashion, with a hero able to kill swathes of no-name NPCs and able to gain and keep more Advantage Dice as long as he keeps winning. If he suffers any wounds these temporarily reduce his Devotion, so limiting the degree to which he can call upon the gods for their favor.

A god has just the one attribute: Divinity. Representing the power he has over his Domain, it is calculated from the total Devotion that all of the heroes have that deity at the start of each session. Divinity points are spent to assert a god's power over his Domain in several ways. Divine Authority lets a god answer the questions that the GM ordinarily would in any other game, the hero turning to the appropriate god for answers. Thus if our sailor hero wants to know if he will catch the pirate ship by daylight, he will turn to the God of Wisdom, whose player may provide the answer. A GM can veto any answer, but rules are included if the gods want to bicker amongst themselves over such a question. A god can grant a hero even more Devotion dice for an action through Divine Inspiration, as well as getting involved in events directly, either through Divine Intervention to aid a hero, or Divine Retribution to curse or hinder him. The only thing a god cannot do is kill a hero. A god can also grant or confiscate Blessings upon a hero. These do singular things such as Slash, Kiss of Enticement, Fill Platter, and so on.

As a Hero's Devotion increases, the relationship with his god (or gods) increases in potency. He rises from Acolyte to Anointed to Champion, each granting him certain extra abilities and a greater chance that his god will listen. To rise to these levels, a hero must accomplish tasks known as Defining Moments. These are moments of roleplaying *par excellence* and great gaming significance, recognized not just by the GM but also by the players. Indeed, in ***Enemy Gods*** it is the gods themselves that vote upon such matters.

Enemy Gods is supported by four appendices that detail a complete ready-to-play pantheon, their antithesis the Fell Gods, a setting, and a guide for the GM to create his own set of gods. Within the details of the given Pantheon and Fell Gods are found details of artifact and monster creation, as well as quick and dirty rules for handling sorcerers, who are (of course) evil. The setting is "Shanri," an island chain made up of several city-states and settled by the Ven, a Bronze Age people. Of course, the GM is free to use this, create his own, or even run a game using the Greek, Roman, Norse, or any other pantheon of his choosing. ***Enemy Gods*** is perfectly suited to emulating the Greek or Norse myths.

Available as a 60-page 5.5"×8.5"-sized spiral bound book or as a 0.8 MEG PDF, ***Enemy Gods*** is an enjoyable little read. It needs another editorial pass, and in places the writing discusses aspects of the game before they are fully explained. It is irritating that the introduction ends mid-sentence, but fans of John Wick will be pleased to see that the game includes a mini-rant, this time against a very big game. (The same rant appears in the author's otherwise delightful ***Cat: A Little Game About Little Heroes.***)

Although it needs a closer study than its size suggests to gain a full understanding of ***Enemy Gods***, the duality of playing both hero and god is easily grasped. While it is easy for the player of a hero and a god to keep each other "happy," he also has to work to keep the other gods and heroes just as happy. To do otherwise will lose both characters the benefits of Devotion, but losing the favor of god is not without gaming possibilities as a hero attempts to regain it. The set-up of the game is very epic in nature and the game should be run as so, lending itself to the crafting of grand tales and myths. This is all down to the central duality lying at the heart of the game, without which it would not work. That it does only serves to make ***Enemy Gods: A little game of big powers*** perfectly suited to the telling of legends and epics.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Dungeon Master's Guide II (for *Dungeons & Dragons*)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Jesse Decker, David Noonan, Chris Thomasson, James Jacobs, & Robin D. Laws

Edited by Michele Carter, Chris Thomasson, Ray Vallese, Penny Williams, & Kim Mohan

Art & graphics by Matt Cavotta, Kalman Andrasofszky, Mitch Cotie, Ed Cox, Steve Ellis, Wayne England, Emily Fiegenschuh, Randy Gallegos, Brian Hagan, Ginger Kubic, Raven Mimura, William O'Connor, Michael Phillippi, Vinod Rams, Wayne Reynolds, Dan Scott, Ron Spencer, Arnie Swekel, Franz Vohwinkel, Dee Barnett, & Todd Gamble

288-page full-color hardbound; \$39.95

It's a truism that just about anything that does well in modern media is going to see a sequel. The *Dungeon Master's Guide II* is a supplementary volume intended to make the referee's job easier, but it achieves only mixed results.

The chapters in this volume imperfectly track those in the original *Dungeon Master's Guide* -- chapter seven is about magic items in both books, for example. Wizards claims this manual is a lot more advice for the DM's benefit, and a way to raise one's game to the next level; the first part of the book lives up to this promise. It dissects the game group dynamics by player and game type, and tells you how to keep various personalities interested and active. This isn't new, but it bears repeating for some folks, and others might not have heard it. (Incidentally, Robin Laws, one of the authors, wrote similar material for *Robin's Laws of Good Game Mastering*, though there's no way to know who wrote what in here.)

Alas, there does seem to be some padding throughout, though most of it winds through the manual in small veins rather than squatting in blocky chunks at the end of a section. For example, the part on adventures is good: there are rules for chases and setting adventures in exotic locales like villages in the trees and ice bridges. Then again, the chases may end up among crowds, and while considering a crowd as a sort of obstacle is a neat take, the crowd rules run long. The traps section is uninspired -- instead of helping DMs create puzzles or insidious new challenges, they just offer a few new undead or haunting traps, etc., with an appropriate Difficulty Class.

There's solid advice for creating and maintaining a balanced campaign, but it shifts to a lot of medieval history. It admits most players probably want the idealized fantasy setting, then proceeds to tell us at length how awful things really were. Even here there are hidden elements DMs should consider, but there's no reason readers should have to sift through the history lesson to get to the good stuff, and sift they will. The idea of using magical events (something magical goes awry and threatens the countryside) is a plot device few people need explained to them, but there are also piles of terrific plot seeds.

New options for PCs include running their own business and apprenticeships. They can become the mentor or the

learner and gain bonuses from the relationship. They can dedicate themselves to working together to get teamwork benefits, little maneuvers that long-standing comrades would be used to using like knowing when to get out of the spellcaster's way and how to charge together. Not only did this mechanic appear in *Heroes of Battle*, some of it is lifted with little modification from that book.

The magic items chapter offers what sound like a lot of new options, but when all is said and done they're really just ability lists. There are new abilities to layer onto your weapons, armor, and more, but here they're called templates or synergy abilities -- the latter is a fancy way of saying if you get an ability on your sword, you can stack an improved version on it. These aren't worthless entries by any measure, but at the same time they're not as impressive as they sound.

Not all the chapter's offerings are unremarkable, however. Signature traits and bonding add a good bit of flavor to your equipment -- even if it's just cosmetic, a mace sounds like something more when it has a smoky sheen and traces its pedigree to the forge of the sorcerer Glazz High-Art. More importantly (from a mechanics viewpoint), the mace is now a bane against fiends when wielded by Drok the Barbarian because he personally used it to crush the life from Ferreent the Deathless. He and the weapon have an unshakable bond that provides power and storytelling possibilities.

Readers should be aware the book promises time-saving material and information, not just "expert advice." They pick apart the process of managing time both at the table and before sitting down to it. Saltmarsh, a small town that ought to be familiar to readers of the early 80s effort *The Sinister Secret of Saltmarsh*, has been transplanted here and expanded so DMs will have a hub for all their campaign activities. The city lives and breathes in these pages, which makes it one of the more cogent pieces in the book.

This time prestige classes don't pad the word count, because for once there aren't any. Instead you get a more useful set of tips on how to create such classes of your own, balanced for play. The information given is insightful and points out a lot of important things you might not have thought of when trying your hand at making your own.

The artwork is a letdown this time, too. Some of it is competent, and a few pieces are even striking, but a lot of the illustrations look like the sort of stuff you'd find in an off-brand children's book.

The book represents itself accurately on the back cover, so read it carefully. Little of this is of great utility to seasoned folks, and even newbies will find some of it sophomoric. Buyers are encouraged to skim the table of contents to make sure they know what they're getting into before plunking down their cash. While there are bright spots, the *Dungeon Master's Guide II* reads more like a repository for short essays that had little value -- and less salability -- on their own. This book is just what it says it is, and it's not hard to reach your goals when you set your sights low.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

For Sale

Published by [Uberplay](#)

Designed by Stefan Dorra

60 full-color cards, 72 chips, 1 rulebook; \$19.95

There is a mathematical/psychological puzzle surrounding the notion of auctioning off a dollar. Obviously, in a typical auction you'd expect the bidding to stop at ninety nine cents, or a dollar at most. The curiosity stems from a simple rule change: the number two bidder must pay his bid as well, though he gets nothing! Now if you bid a dollar and someone bids a dollar ten, you're motivated to bid a dollar twenty, since winning the auction and losing twenty cents is better than losing the auction and losing your dollar. Google "dollar auction" to read about this curious parlor game that arose from an attempt to create a game that demonstrated addiction . . .

Obviously, the winning move is not to play, but in ***For Sale*** you are gently tugged into one of the most gentle but brutal auction mechanisms around, as you buy homes, and then try to sell them for the most money.

The game is played in two distinct phases. In the first phase the players bid their starting money tokens to purchase homes of various values (one each of one through 30), and in the second phase these homes are sold for checks (two void, and two each of \$2,000 through \$15,000). Your final score is the total of all your checks plus whatever money you had left over from the first phase.

During the first phase each auction is started by dealing out face up as many home cards as there are players. Players then, in turn, push forward coins in the amount of their bid. When a player drops out he retrieves half his bid and takes the home card with the lowest remaining value. Yes, that means you can drop out immediately and take the lowest valued card for free. The last player remaining pays his full bid and takes the last card, which is the highest-valued home from that auction.

Thus each player wins exactly one card in each auction, bidding simply determines who gets which card, and how much they pay. You cannot, of course, bid more than you have remaining. When all the homes have been purchased this way, the first phase is over.

During the second phase you also deal out one check card for each player each round, but this is a once-around blind auction. After the players see the values of the checks each selects a home card from their now-hidden hand, and the cards are revealed simultaneously. The player offering the highest home card takes the highest valued check, the second highest home card gets the second highest check, etc. No ties are possible since there is only one of each value home card. The home cards used are discarded after each round.

When all the players have used up all their home cards they will each have the same number of check cards, these are totaled, and victory is determined.

The auction mechanism in the first half leads to some very new choices. When the values of the cards are close together you may not want to win: you may want to be the second-to-last player to drop out, since the number two card at half you bid is a better deal than the best card at full price. It's great fun to bump up the bid; as you watch players drop out, you know the card you get will be better. But there's that occasional moment of terror when you realize they all may drop out, leaving you to pay full price.

But the worst is when the best card is substantially better than the next best card -- if you find that you're one of the

last two left in the bidding, and before you realized it the bid has risen such that the second best card is not worth half your current bid. That's the time to hope you have more money than the other player.

Another happy feature is that this is one game where you get to round in your favor: If you bid three and then drop out you get to take back two coins, not one. While this feels good for its own sake it opens up the chance to bid one higher to take the odd number when you expect to drop out next time around -- it costs you nothing, but it will cost the remaining players a coin each.

The second phase reveals the true importance of the choices you made in the first round: the 30 home card is powerful, but it can still only win one auction. And low cards you thought were not a problem because you got them for free each represent one auction you will have to lose.

The components are well done. The money tokens are thick, textured cardboard in denominations of one (silver) and two (gold). The house cards feature a bright, friendly cartoon style that I personally like. As you can imagine, coming up with 30 distinct homes requires some imagination, and its implemented with a sense of humor. One is a cardboard box in an alley, 30 is a space station. The igloo and the tepee have welcome mats out in front. The houseboat has an alligator hanging out alongside, and most gamers are highly suspicious of the tentacles coming out of the sea behind the little house on its own island.

The jury is still out on whether or not **For Sale** is a good game for kids. On the one hand its very easy and teaches some good lessons about bidding and budgeting; on the other hand, since in both phases everyone gets a card in every auction, you manipulate your fate in subtle steps, and I'm not sure kids can play at a level that would help them learn from the consequences of their actions, as opposed to **Settlers of Catan** or **Bohnanza** where you can see more clearly and immediately the results of your choices.

There is one downside: I always feel a little funny about products that ask me to pay 10 or 15 dollars for a game I could play with ordinary playing cards and a couple of poker chips or "gaming stones." In this case, though, the components are nice and perfectly suited to the game, and the game is easy enough to be played with nearly anyone and will thus get a lot of use. **For Sale** is a filler game for big game sessions, a game that non-gamers can play but won't bore gamers, a game that can be played with kids, and a game with legs.

--C. Andrew Walters

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Icosahedron Adventures

Modern Magic Items

by Owen K.C. Stephens

"Welcome to the supernatural threat hotline. If you're facing an incorporeal monstrosity, press one. For physical threats, press two. If the creature is more of a blob or slime, press three. If it's an incomprehensible interdimensional horror destroying your sanity, press 674##311 . . ."*

There are numerous **d20 System** games that mix magical elements into modern settings. In some magic is a well-known and accepted part of society, while in others it's a secret that only a few are aware of. In such worlds, where magical artificers and television repairmen share the streets, it's logical that magic items would eventually be made from modern items. They may take on a modern appearance as a way of concealing their true function, be designed to help with the inconveniences of a modern life, or just be made up of the materials at hand.

Unfortunately, although the number of possible magic items in a modern world is infinite, interest in such worlds is not. Fewer products are printed to support these campaigns than their pure-fantasy cousins, and as a result there's much less support for GMs trying to imagine what a pizza-eating young urban sorcerer would craft in his spare time. While it's easy to take the magical functions of swords and crossbows and apply them to crowbars and pistols, the modern world has problems and opportunities that can't be properly represented simply by upgrading more traditional fantasy magics. To help fill in a few gaps, here are some magic items specifically geared around modern problems and materials (all written for the standard modern **d20 System** rules).

ACME Catalog

This simple magic item is a large catalog that seems to have a category for anything and everything. It has six order forms in the center of the catalog, which must be ripped free and dropped into a mailbox or postal delivery service for anything to be ordered from the catalog. Such items must have a weight of no more than 200 lbs, a purchase DC of no more than 35, can't be magic or psionic in any way, can't have a military or illegal level of restriction, and must be items that could reasonable be found for sale in a major city. Within those limitations, anything can be ordered from the catalog.

Once an order form is dropped off, a truck carrying the item in question arrives at the same location in 1d6 minutes. The truck is from a normal commercial delivery service, and shows the item was placed for delivery by the ACME company weeks earlier, and is pre-paid in full. Using the ACME catalog has no actual affect on the user's wealth bonus.

Once all six order forms have been used, the *ACME catalog* falls apart in a matter of hours, its pages fading into illegibility. Lesser versions of the catalog (with lower maximum for weight and purchase DC) also exist.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); *Caster Level:* 13th; *Purchase DC:* 39 (38 if 3 or fewer charges remain); *Weight:* 0.25 lb.

Eternalready Batteries

Eternalready batteries always come in sets of two, which must be kept together. If they are separated or placed in different devices, neither works until they are reunited. However, the two batteries swell to fit spaces designed for larger batteries or more batteries, and contract to fit in things with less space. The batteries can power anything driven by a battery no larger than a typical car battery. They never run out of power or need to be recharged.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); Caster Level: 1st; Purchase DC: 26; Weight: 0.25 lb.

Belt of Many Tools

These handy items are heavy leather belts full of pouches, pockets, loops, and hooks similar to those carried by carpenters and construction workers. Despite their relatively light weight and reasonable size, each belt is equipped with a vast collection of tools, including hammers, wrenches, pliers, and screwdrivers of varying sizes and measurements, tape measures, laser pointers, levels, bolt cutters, wire strippers, pencils, nails, screws, voltmeter, leads, wires, and fasteners of all description. In addition to providing the specific tools listed, the belt provides everything needed to serve as a demolitions kit, electrical tool kit, and mechanical tool kit. These items are linked to the belt, and if handed out are lost by the borrower in 1d6 minutes (reappearing in the *belt of many tools*). Additionally, the belt has enough pockets and straps to carry 10 lbs. worth of small items (cell phones, PDAs, notebooks, flashlights, and so on). Items placed in the belt, including its own tools, never fall out.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); Caster Level: 5th; Purchase DC: 29; Weight: 1 lb.

Compact of Cleanliness

A *compact of cleanliness* allows its user to become clean and presentable as a full-round action. Dirt, oil, smears, and smudges are removed from both the user and his clothes, unpleasant smells are eliminated, minor tears and rips in mundane items on the person are repaired, and any make-up or hair-styling appropriate for the user's attire is provided. A *compact of cleanliness* only works once an hour.

Although the compact cleans the user totally to a casual examination, a Search or Investigate check made to find evidence on the user can still succeed, but is at a -8 penalty due to circumstance.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); Caster Level: 2nd; Purchase DC: 27; Weight: 0.1 lb.

Endless Tape Roll

This simple magic item is simply a roll of duct tape that never quite reaches the end. It always looks half-used up and battered, giving no hint of its magical properties until used. It's capable of producing 300 feet of duct tape a day. The tape produced has all the properties of normal duct tape, and is not itself in any way magical. After producing 300 feet of duct tape, the roll seems to have just a tiny tab left which can't be pulled free. By the next day, however, the tab comes loose and can produce another 300 feet of tape.

Most *endless tape rolls* produce normal gray metallic duct tape, two inches wide. A very few have colored tape, and range in width from one inch to as much as four inches.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); Caster Level: 1st; Purchase DC: 24; Weight: 1 lb.

Gloves of Clapping Shutdown

A fairly recent invention, the *gloves of clapping shutdown* are normally fine dress gloves (white linen if worn by a man, black silk or satin if worn by a woman), or fine black or brown leather driving gloves. These simple looking hand-warmers possess the power to shut off electronic devices. This includes anything run off electricity, which has a single button, switch, knob, lever or toggle that can turn it off. The wearer of the gloves must be able to see the switch, know how it operates, and be within 60 feet of it. The wearer then claps his hands together twice, loudly, which is a free action but requires both hands be free. If the object is unattended, it automatically shuts off. An attended object is shut off unless its attendant succeeds at a DC 16 Reflex save.

Anything the gloves have turned off they can also turn on, under the same circumstances. The gloves can only turn things off three times a day, though there is no limit to how often they can turn things back on.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); Caster Level: 7th; Purchase DC: 33; Weight: 1 lb.

Help Line

The *help line* is a phone from which advice and clues about the future can be received. All *help lines* look like phones, but the exact appearance varies depending on when the item was created. Rumors of ancient *help lines* dating back to the early days to telecommunication seem to be unfounded, though there's nothing that would prevent the magic from working on an antique phone. The oldest known examples of *help lines* are 1970's-era lineman's buttsets (a rather large hand-held telephone with lead wires that can be clipped to any telephone line, designed for use by telephone repairmen). More modern *help lines* are almost always cellular phones, though rarely a wireless home phone, satellite phone, or walkie-talkie might be imbued with the same magic abilities.

A *help line* can function like a normal telecommunications device, though a lack of service or damage to its electronics retard its usefulness in this regard just like a mundane phone. Even if broken or disconnected from any telecommunications signal, the *help line's* magical function can be used. Once used, its magic doesn't function again for a full week.

To activate the *help line's* magic, a special phone number must be dialed (or radio frequency tuned in). With modern phones this is normally ###411*, though older phones often have numbers based on local information services or time-and-temperature numbers. The user must then use the keypad or vocal responses to answer a series of questions (which change every time the *help line* is used) that lead the user to advice on whatever topic he's using the *help line* to gain aid for. There's a 90% chance this process takes 1d6+1 rounds, and a 10% chance that after two rounds the user is "put on hold" for 1d20 minutes before getting an answer. The user must replay to question during any time he's not on hold, and that level of concentration requires a standard/attack action each round and provokes attacks of opportunity from any creatures threatening the user.

The *help line* can give advice on a number of subjects. It can act as an *augury* spell with a 90% chance of giving a meaningful reply. The *help line* can also answer questions as if the user had cast *detect magical aura*.

If the user has line of sight on a creature, he can learn one weakness the creature has (see the section on weaknesses in the standard modern **d20 System** rules). The user learns what material/condition the weakness centers around, and whether the material induces addiction, attraction, aversion, fascination, fear or harm. Alternatively, it can reveal one type of attack (silver, fire, bludgeoning weapons) against which the creature has no special defenses.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); Caster Level: 10th; Purchase DC: 36; Weight: 0.1 to 1 lb.

Holster of Concealment

A *holster of concealment* is a high-quality holster with buckles and belt-loops that allow it to be rigged as a belt or shoulder holster (or, for those designed for Small pistols, even an ankle holster). The holster is always of a very modern design in black or brown leather, with a retaining strap that forces anyone other than the wearer to make a successful DC 20 Reflex save if trying to draw a pistol from the holster. It can act as a concealed holster. It can hold any one pistol of a given size (Large, Medium-size or Small, depending on the holster), and one magazine or speed-loader for that pistol.

Any pistol or accessories in a *holster of concealment* are immune to detection by technological means of any kind. They do not show up on X-rays, do not set off metal detectors, and are essentially invisible and intangible to any machine or detection device. The holster also conceals itself and the pistol and magazine within it from the *detect magical aura* spell, though not other divination magics. Finding the holster with a physical pat-down is difficult (DC 30 Search check), though anyone who has seen the holster in use gains a +20 circumstance bonus. The holster does not

make itself invisible to the naked eye, so if worn openly it can easily be spotted.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); *Caster Level:* 5th; *Purchase DC:* 33; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Holster of Speed

A *holster of speed* is normally a worn, Old West-style holster or worn, carved brown leather. Such holsters can accommodate any revolver (changing shape to allow the pistol to fit snugly within), but only 25% are able to wrap themselves around a semi-automatic. (The other 75% shove any such weapon out, generally with a noise that sounds like a disgruntled snort). All such holsters are attached to a broad waist-belt with storage for 30 pistol rounds.

Drawing a pistol from a *holster of speed* is a free action, mas is putting the pistol back in its place. Further, any effort to reload a revolver with rounds stored on the holster's attached belt is a move action, or a free action that can be taken when the user takes a normal move action. Anyone with the Personal Firearms Proficiency making a reputation check to determine if they've heard of a character wearing a *holster of speed* gains a +4 circumstance bonus to that check.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); *Caster Level:* 5th; *Purchase DC:* 33; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Incognito Sunglasses

Often used by the rich and famous (at least among those with access to magic), these sunglasses are stylish and well-built, but not so spectacular as to attract attention. In fact, anyone wearing them is treated as having only half their actual Reputation bonus when anyone makes a Reputation check to see if they recognize the wearer. The sunglasses aren't an actual disguise -- anyone who makes their check successfully recognizes the wearer correctly; viewers are just less likely to think of the wearer as important.

Rumors persist of a similar magic item that makes the wearer appear to be a mild-mannered reporter, but as yet no concrete proof of these claims has even been found.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); *Caster Level:* 1st; *Purchase DC:* 26; *Weight:* --

Phantasmal ID

The *phantasmal ID* is a fake ID imbued with magic to allow it to become a fake ID of any kind. With an act of will from the holder, it can be a driver's license, FBI badge or electric company employee ID with equal ease. The DC to detect the ID as a forgery is 25, although it has no more background support than a normal fake ID (a call to the FBI quickly reveals a false agent, no matter how good his ID is). Unlike a normal fake ID, the *phantasmal ID* also has some chance of deceiving security systems keys to ID cards. The magic item is treated as having a +10 Disable Device bonus whenever it tries to fool a security system.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); *Caster Level:* 5th; *Purchase DC:* 28; *Weight:* --

Recorder of Translation

A *recorder of translation* is a Tiny, hand-held audio recorder able to record up to 15 minutes of sound on a small audio cassette. Additionally, any cassette the recorder itself was used to record can be played back on the *recorder as a translation*, translating any spoken words into a common language. (Usually *recorders of translation* only translate into French, though any language known by the spellcaster that creates the item can be chosen. Once set, the language of translation cannot be changed.)

Recently a few digital audio recorders of translation have appeared. These can only record 10 minutes of sound and must erase old recordings before they can record new sound, but have the advantage of being able to translate words

into 1d4+1 different languages, and download any recording or translation into a computer.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); *Caster Level:* 7th; *Purchase DC:* 32; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Skeleton Key

These obvious and iconic magic items have been independently invented by dozens of different spellcasters over the centuries. Each *skeleton key* has a slightly different appearance, depending on what kind of key was imbued with magic to form the item. They all maintain the appearance of a normal key, except that the head of the key takes on the outline of a skull. A *skeleton key* automatically opens any lock of up to its quality level without requiring the proper key or a Disable Device check.

One in 10 *skeleton keys* can also be used to automatically disable a security device of the same quality. The caster level and purchase DC for such keys is 4 higher.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); *Caster Level:* 1st-5th; *Purchase DC:* 26 (average), 28 (high quality), 30 (high security); *Weight:* 0.1 lb.

Supra Legal Pad

Appearing to be nothing more than a large pad of yellow, legal-size note paper in a high-quality leather binder, the *supra legal pad* is actually a powerful tome of arcane lore that has been compressed into a few one-shot magical invocations. By writing on the pad, the writer can produce amazing legal documentation, and even cause minor legal matters to be taken care of automatically. Once a few sheets have been used for a given legal issue, they are used up and gone forever. When first created a *supra legal pad* has enough paper for 10 uses, but most are found with only 1d4+1 charges remaining.

A *supra legal pad* can be used for the following effects. A GM must determine the exact limits of these functions.

Auto-Brief: The writer can express his point of view in plain words, and the pad transforms it into a well-reasoned legal argument, with as much precedent and legal citation as exists for said point of view. This grants a +4 circumstance bonus to all skill check made to sway the outcome of a court proceeding where the auto-brief is used (including those where the writer is a defendant, prosecutor, or is allowed to file a friend-of-the-court brief).

Instant Bankruptcy: The writer gains an immediate, legally binding Chapter 7 bankruptcy (or similar legal proceeding, in countries other than the US). All his unsecured debts are dismissed, and secured debts are either dismissed or placed at a low, set interest rate. The writer may keep one modest house and one modest vehicle, but any other possession or asset with a Purchase DC of 16 or greater disappears (if easily portable) or is legally assigned to an auction house for liquidation. Even hidden assets undergo this adjustment. The writer's wealth bonus resets to 1d4+6.

Instant Filing: The writer can write out a simple filing, petition, or motion and have it immediately filed in the appropriate courthouse. This does not allow the writer to bypass the court process for important matters (such as criminal proceedings), but does allow him to immediately and retroactively handle anything a DC 15 Diplomacy check would have been sufficient to obtain at court, such as a fishing permit, parade permit, building permit, restraining order (for which there is ample evidence), and similar papers.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); *Caster Level:* 7th; *Purchase DC:* 32 (31 if 5 or fewer charges remain); *Weight:* 0.25 lb.

Television of Relevance

Though they vary wildly in size and quality, most *televisions of relevance* are Small portable black-and-white sets with rabbit ears. Once per day, the television can be turned to "channel R," causing it to produce a news report of interest to the person who set the channel. If there is an actual newscast of relevance on any channel, it is produced.

Otherwise, the television produces a slightly fuzzy picture of a newscast that produces relevant information in a report-like manner. This acts as a Gather Information or Research skill check made with a total bonus of +15 on a topic of interest to the channel-setting character. If that character is aware of the item's powers he may choose the topic, otherwise it is a random topic he is currently interested in.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); *Caster Level:* 11th; *Purchase DC:* 36; *Weight:* 5 lbs. (typical)

King Prince of Beasts

for *In Nomine*

by Elizabeth McCoy

Note: The following adventure is based upon a premise which is **not canon** at the time of this writing. It might become a canon rumor or theory.

Administrivia for the GM

This is an adventure primarily for demonic characters. Angels, ethereals, and humans may participate (or try to thwart it from the other side), but the prize is Infernal. Characters may be the normal 9-Force demons, or the GM could have a more humorous tone with demonlings and demons of 5 to 8 Forces. In a mixed group, the GM may give lower-Force Infernals character points equal to what the highest-Force character has, in order to purchase enough Resources to hold their own. (The *Liber Servitorum* may provide pre-generated PCs, for a one-shot.)

While the GM can introduce this into an existing game, the payoff is a Word and even Princedom. The group might need to be retired . . . but this could be a way to end a campaign with a bang!

Enter the Victims Characters

The Lightbringer intends to grant a *particular* Word. The first the characters hear of their involvement is when their respective Princes inform them that they are candidates, and must report to an office in Kronos' Archive to get further details. (Anyone with Bound or similar Discords will be given transport. A Free Lilim may have a Geas invoked to participate!)

Upon arrival, the characters will be ushered into an office which is not as cramped as they might expect. Their hostess and informant is Saboth, an attractive Lilim of Fate. Wise demons will let her get on with the briefing. Those who wish to take notes are permitted.

According to Saboth's presentation, Kronos, the Prince of Fate, sponsored one of his Shedim as the Demon of Beasts. When this was done, he learned that animals have two destinies. If they achieve neither, they are reincarnated. If they achieve their Heavenly destiny, they go to Heaven. If they achieve their *second* destiny . . . they are incarnated as humans.

Saboth, with any encouragement, will go into an explanation of how this is proof of the Finite Souls Theory -- that eventually, the number of souls on Earth will be exhausted, and only remnant-like shells will roam the planet. According to FST, at one point even one-celled animals had souls, but as the number of more advanced species grew, the less-advanced were no longer ensouled. If the group wishes to discuss this theory, Saboth will let them do so (for as long as the *players* are interested in the implications). Eventually she will bring them back to the main reason they're there.

The Shedite Demon of Beasts went to Earth and was, apparently, eaten by Jordi, the Archangel of Animals. *C'est la vie*. While Kronos no longer cares whose Servitor a replacement Demon of Beasts is, he and Lucifer both *want* one. Considering the obvious danger of getting this Word, it was deemed that most sensible demons wouldn't apply, and many Princes wouldn't bother to sponsor anyone. As the prior Demon of Beasts showed the perils of lack of sense . . . Lucifer has required that each Prince select some number of Servitors who will compete to gain the Word. They *will* compete to the fullest extent of their abilities, under pain of the Lightbringer's displeasure. On the positive side, Saboth's information strongly suggests that the lucky demon will not only gain a Word, but a Princedom; any runners

up will be offered as initial staff to the new Prince (as will Saboth herself).

Saboth is responsible for briefing the candidates, getting the paperwork filed so Fate Servitors should cooperate with on matters which pertain to gaining the Word, and supplying minor items if they have a good explanation for how it will advance the Word of Fate while working toward the Word of Beasts. She is also a Lilim in disfavor with her Prince; when she says that she is commanded to do anything in her power to aid the candidates, this includes submitting to non-fatal depravities. (Of course, whatever's done to her will affect how much aid she's likely to render. Paperwork can be . . . misplaced easily, in the Archive.)

Candidates will all receive a vessel/6 of a reasonable animal type; blue whales are *probably* over the top. Shedim are given the Song of Possession/6. The GM may bestow these via "one-shot relics" which were crafted by Kronos and can be handed out as needed (making the vessels come from a pre-selected stock and requiring special paperwork or a personal meeting to get something unusual), or the GM may have Kronos personally grant these boons.

Working Together?

Any demon with an Ethereal Force to its name is likely to figure out that setting off alone, when Jordi has presumably figured out that there's a Word-competition going on, is suicidal. (If necessary, Saboth can mention this.) While only one of them is going to get the brass ring, having a support staff is an important thing for a new Prince -- especially if said staff hasn't been loaned from someone else, causing the new royalty to be beholden to the elder one. If you're trustworthy enough, and get along enough with your team-mates, then it's the fast-track to a Dukedom as second place.

This *should* keep the backstabbing to a minimum.

Other groups of NPC candidates are presumed to exist; if the PCs witness a set of them being eaten alive by fruit flies because of insufficient cooperation, it may be instructive. (The Songs of Acid, Fangs, Claws, Tongue, and Form are all good for a Kyriotate of Animals to possess, and can make for a very dangerous swarm of fruit flies at the GM's option.)

Part of the whole "candidate for a Word" thing is forcing the demons to come up with ideas to promote the Word. In case no one has a hair-brained scheme, or takes inspiration from Princely orders (below), here are some possible approaches.

- Promote an extreme animal-rights group; organize a huge charity ball for their cause, with celebrities. If the press can be swayed with Songs, attunements, or resonances, it could be a huge success.
- Concoct a half-breed human monkey, live or false, and tout it as the "missing link." If it can survive genetic scrutiny as a link between man and beast, even demons who *aren't* Nybassians can sway that Prince to help promote the concept. Hopefully, Lightning and Animals will stalemate themselves instead of destroying the Infernals responsible.
- Start a new fad among the fanatic ecological conservationists -- Beastialization. With selective brain surgery and hormonal treatments, a human can be "reverted to a state more harmonious with nature," and released to a preserve to live out the "natural life" as the ape it is. Vapula and Kobal would both be delighted with this sort of approach.

If any demon rolls a 666 during the probable mayhem that any plan will generate, the GM should take this as a sign that they are (somehow, probably against all odds) on the right track to pleasing the First Balseraph.

Secret Orders

Most of the Princes are less than pleased to have to pony up some of their Servitors; even the losers are almost certainly going to be given to whoever wins the competition. Some are tossing screw-ups into the ring. Some are picking the cream, in the hopes of getting an allied Prince. Some are hedging their bets, with promising Servitors who aren't *too* special. All the Princes want the competitors to be promoting *their* Words, in the meantime. It may be the

last work they get out of their minions, so it'd better be good.

Instructions may have been given to the PCs before the briefing, in which case they probably knew what was up, or handed over in a sealed packet for after they are briefed. They may burst into a character's mind as a "time-bomb" of data, placed there when the Prince picked up the Servitor. They might show up as a Celestial Song of Tongues, or as personal directions after the initial planning sequence, causing problems if the PCs have already brainstormed something. *C'est la vie*.

Andrealphus would like more bestiality, please. He'll settle for more people dressing up like animals to have sex, but he'd prefer that "fur-suited furversion" become the only reason to like animals. He may bestow appropriate decorative Numinous Corpus Songs, and will make sure the new animal vessel is not neutered.

Asmodeus will finagle the paperwork to grant a Role/1 to any appropriate animal vessel. He favors anything which advances the Game, in either the greater or trivial aspects; if racetracks can be sucked away from Mammon (Prince of Greed and former Gamester), that will be acceptable. Allied with Kronos, he is surprisingly lenient about how much Word-boost he expects.

Baal is annoyed that Kronos has persuaded Lucifer to give resources to a minor Word like Beasts, but at least it will annoy Jordi. Any of his Servitors should be laying the groundwork for animals in the military and police, the better for demons of Beasts to infiltrate. Cyborg animal-soldier research is acceptable.

Beleth wants werewolf tales, insanity with bestial traits, and the assumption that any animal could be rabid at any time. Spontaneously. She would also look favorably on any plot that gives people the impression they could be turned into some beast-human hybrid and sold into slavery -- fear of beasts, and of turning bestial, is her spin. (Bonus points if the celestial forms of Cherubim can be made terrifying in the human mind.) She may provide a minor Numinous Corpus, if sufficiently impressed.

Belial is outwardly uncaring what any minion of his does. "Just don't get burned." (Secretly, he doesn't want his Servitor to win, and may send assassins after any Fire-demons who get "in the lead." He is less anxious about giving someone up to be someone else's Servitor, so being an assistant in a successful plan is not as liable to "friendly fire.")

Haagenti thinks animals are there to be eaten, and this should be emphasized. Make vegetarians laughing stocks. Make man just another beast to be devoured. Help out Kobal's people. Get Haagenti lots of chicken.

Kobal is the Prince Most Likely To Have Sent Demonlings as the majority of his candidates. Whatever you do, make it darkly funny. Serious bonus points if you make Prince off it, and then do something to make Kronos less powerful. Total bonus points if whatever you do nets you a Princedom *and* makes Kronos less powerful as well.

Kronos wants a Demon of Beasts. He will work with any Prince of Beasts to ensure that animals gain a fate -- or failing that, how to pinpoint what their "human destiny" is, so that they become vulnerable to Fate's demons. Naturally, he would be pleased to have said Prince come from his ranks, even as Vapula did.

Lilith has one suggestion which will go to *any* Lilim, Bound or Free. "Be a good Duchess." She is also *delighted* to do favors for her Daughters, and the Geases are really quite attractive, don't you think? She charges more for favors when the plan has a lot of captive animals and/or humans.

Malphas wants focus on the loners, the psychopaths with no ties and no sense of the pack. Those who have no sense of the ties in human society. The mavericks, the rogues, the lone wolves. Humanity should fear the beast in each other's hearts.

Nybbas wants something flashy, that will create *news*, babe. Some of Vapula's ideas are pretty flashy. (So are some of Andre's.) He may provide Summonable camera relics.

Saminga wants more zombis. Zombi animals. Packs of zombi gerbils sweeping across towns at night and devouring humans live. If this Finite Souls Theory is true, then binding souls into undead form will also bring about the soulless

Earth, where everything is dead and empty and doesn't know it. That's a *good* thing.

Valefor likes cat-burglars, but is more interested in themes that steal the innocence of animals, and the humanity of humans. Uplift animals to sapiency? Muddy humans' place as the chosen of God? Now that would be a Theft; a Prince who did that might be the Prince of humans as just another kind of beast.

Vapula is clearly thinking along the lines of Dr. Moreau. He is also interested in the transfiguration of a soul from animal to human, and how this might be accomplished. (If, indeed, the information is accurate.) Whatever plan is hatched, he would like one with a great deal of *data* for him.

Saboth, Lilim of Fate

Corporeal Forces - 2	Strength 4	Agility 4
Ethereal Forces - 4	Intelligence 7	Precision 9
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 10	Perception 6

Vessels: Human woman/2, Charisma +2; Cat/6*

Skills: Artistry/1, Computer Operation/1, Detect Lies/1, Emote/1, Fast-Talk/2, Knowledge (Area: Archive/3, Finite Souls Theory/4, Psychology/2), Languages* (Native/3, Others/1), Lying/1, Savoir-Faire/1, Seduction/3.

Songs: Attraction (Ethereal/4), Harmony (Ethereal/3), Healing (All/1).

Attunements: Lilim of Fate

* Her cat vessel is new, so that she can covertly communicate with PCs on Earth if they happen to be in animal vessels of their own. (If the entire group has taken something aquatic, or otherwise made a cat vessel too obvious, she'll get something else as well. Likewise, her Language skills are suited for the areas she needs to operate in.)

Saboth's cooperation does *not* stretch to explaining why she is in her Prince's bad graces; she has apparently been sentenced to silence on the matter by Kronos himself. Aside from that, she has been instructed do anything that will not actually strip a Force from her, be dissonant, get her into trouble with the Game, or further displease her Prince. Naturally, the details of her cooperation will vary depending on how she's treated, and she will tread on the thin edge of any of those restrictions if she thinks a relatively kind PC has a shot at the Word and probable Princedom -- once she's been put in the new Prince's service, she'll be in less danger from Fate's wrath. (Not no danger, but less.)

While on the corporeal plane, the PCs may or may not be able to contact Saboth and enlist her aid, depending on how many groups of NPCs she is also acting as liaison for. If the GM wants, each group can have its own contact, and Saboth will be sent with the PCs; she will probably have a Vapulan cellphone which connects to Hell, for making arrangements. Then again, Saboth may be managing all candidates, and be unavailable most or all of the time.

What exactly she did to disgrace herself may never be found, or it could be an integral complication in whatever plans the PCs hatch for their candidacy -- GM's choice.

Pyramid Review

Doom: The Boardgame

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Kevin Wilson

11-Inch Square Full Color Rule Book, 11-Inch Square Full Scenario Guide Book, 4 Reference Cards, 3 Vinyl Marine Miniatures, 63 Vinyl Invader Miniatures, 6 Custom Dice, 66 Invader Cards, 18 Marine Cards, 3 Marine Equipment Bin Cards, 58 Map Sections, 14 Doors, & 201 Card Tokens; \$54.95

While it was not the first, *Doom* is arguably the godfather of the FPS, or First Person Shooter; with the release of *Doom: The Boardgame*, it has crossed over into other formats. While Steve Jackson Games' similarly FPS-inspired *Frag* does player versus player, *Doom: The Boardgame* goes back to basics. It's not about killing each other, but blasting away at the bad guys . . . in this case, hell spawn!

Designed for two to four players, *Doom: The Boardgame* is a story- or scenario-driven game in which one, two, or three Marines, newly assigned to the Union Aerospace Corporation's Mars base, must fight through wave after wave of invading demons in order to escape. In this, the marines must cooperate to survive, as the odds are heavily stacked in favor of the Invaders. The Marines are highly trained, possessing various special abilities (represented by the Marine Cards), and can assign several types of Orders to gain temporary advantages; while they have access to an array of weaponry, ammunition supplies are limited. The Invaders can send several types of creatures at the Marines, there is an almost unlimited supply of them, and they never run out of ammunition. The Invader player is also able to influence events in his favor with the Invader Cards.

From the start, *Doom* is a great-looking game, with oodles of high quality components that includes miniatures, dice, Invader and Marine Cards, almost 60 map sections, and over 200 tokens of various types. The miniatures are done in roughly 25mm scale, reasonably molded in durable vinyl and in three somewhat garish colors: red, blue, and green. The colors correspond to the three Marine figures, easily the least interesting figures in the box, but also easily replaced. The Invader figures consist of Zombies, Imps, Trites, Mancubus, Hell Knights, demons, Archviles, and Cyberdemons. In play the Imp and Archville figures are not easily differentiated, but the Cyberdemon, a large two-piece figure, is instantly recognized. All of the tokens, map pieces, and Marine Equipment Bins are done in thick cardboard.

The maps are marked in inch-wide squares, slot together easily, and -- once laid out -- can be modified with various terrain features. The tokens come in a variety of shapes and colors, making them easily recognized and handled. Yet the huge number of components causes several problems. The first is that they do not fit back in the box, and the second is that the *only* concession made to internal packaging is space for the cards. Otherwise, internal packaging is wholly absent, and putting the game away required lots of ziplock bags. *none* of which should have been necessary.

Two large 11-inch square booklets come in the box. The first is the Instruction Manual, its contents handled with clarity, from rules to layout, and supported with plenty of examples. The second is just for the Invader player and contains just five scenarios. Again presented in an easy-to-use fashion, five scenarios do not actually sound a great deal, but each is a challenge, and should take several attempts. Should the Invader player want more, the publisher has promised more to download from its website. Only one has been made available so far, but [BoardGameGeek.com](#) has several more, all fan-created. Indeed, it is not difficult to design more scenarios.

Setup is simple. Select a scenario and lay out the map, placing the tokens and terrain as indicated. The map will be

revealed to the Marine players as they explore. The more Marines involved in a scenario, the fewer the number of Ammo, Armor, and Wound they start the game with. They will also have fewer Marine Cards. Conversely, the more Marines there are, the more Invader Cards the Invader player has and the greater the number of figures he has to throw at them. The positioning and type of Invaders is color-coded to the Marines in play. Each Marine player also has a Marine Equipment Bin, used to track the Marine's Ammo, Armor, and Health tokens.

A Marine also starts the game with two or three Marine cards. They provide permanent special abilities such as Survival Ops (gives a Marine three extra Wounds), Killer Instinct (allows an extra attack after a Marine kills an Invader), and Special Ops (makes the Marine deadlier with close-in weaponry). The game's weaponry has been simplified to fist, chainsaw, pistol, SMG, chain gun, rocket launcher, plasma gun, and BFG. Ammunition has been further simplified to three types: shells/bullets, rockets/grenades, and energy cells. A Marine starts with just his fists and the pistol. The rest he must pick up. A number of special abilities are shared between various weapons and the Invaders, Accuracy, Blast, Deadly, Knockback, and Sweep. All add a further tactical consideration to the game.

Actual game play is simple. On his turn a Marine has two actions from a choice of four: Unload (stand and shoot twice), Advance (move and shoot once), Sprint (move twice), and Ready (move and place an Order). Orders are represented by four tokens. Aim lets a Marine re-roll bad dice on his next attack. Dodge forces an Invader to re-roll an attack. Guard allows a Marine to interrupt the Invader's turn with an attack. Heal restores a Wound to a Marine.

Besides revealing the map, the Invader player has plenty to do as both referee and player. On his turn, he draws new Invader cards from the Event Deck, plays one card to spawn a new Invader piece, and then in turn, activates the Invaders in play. The activated piece is moved towards the Marines and makes an attack. Invader Event cards can be played at any time determined by their conditions. Effects include Dud (forces a Marine to discard an Ammo token), Charge (double an Invader's movement), Smash (remove an obstacle or door in play), and Ambush (activate a single figure before a Marine's turn).

At the heart of **Doom: The Boardgame** is -- unsurprisingly -- its combat system. This is handled with style and panache, and in a single roll of the dice. They come in four colors, and are marked with numbers, bullet hole and ammo icons, and a large "X." If the latter is rolled, it indicates a miss; the bullet holes the number of rounds that hit; the ammo the number of Ammo tokens expended; while the numbers rolled, add up to the range. A Wound is inflicted each time the number of hits exceeds a target's Armor value. The number and color of dice rolled varies by weapon and creature. Once an Invader figure has lost its Wounds, it is removed from the board, though recording its lost Wounds in the meantime is awkward.

The aim for the Marines is both survival and achieving a scenario's objectives. The Invader player must inflict six Frags on the Marine players. These are achieved by killing the Marines, who re-spawn nearby, or alternatively, the Invader player exhausts the Invader Event Deck for one Frag.

A game of **Doom** should last roughly two to three hours and present a challenge to the Marine players. During our first try, Ryan and Tim got driven back and ran out of ammunition in going the other way. On the second try, both fared much better. They worked more closely together, employing their Marine special abilities to greater effect. Even so, they did not succeed, highlighting how tough the game is. To Tim's mind, it was slightly too tough, and while this should be so, the publisher has made available guidelines for balancing the game on its website. Another complaint is the difficulty in determining a weapon's effective range without checking the dice first; however, surely in a desperate situation like **Doom**, do the Marines have the time? Indeed, it is something that you check when playing the computer game? Others might malign the lack of player versus player rules, but again, is that the point of a scenario driven game like **Doom**? The lack of rules for handing the Invaders automatically and thus allowing solo play is disappointing though.

My girlfriend described **Doom** as a dungeon bash with big guns. In fact, she will play this, but not the computer game. Its problems are major and minor. The inadequate packaging is minor, but the high luck factor involved in receiving the Marine Cards -- which can make or break a game -- is exacerbated by the mechanics favoring the Invader. The result is that a scenario in **Doom** is not un-winnable, but the Marines must work at it, cooperating with weapon and special ability use. And they must move forward, though with a care as to the dangers ahead. All that aside, **Doom** is a

blast to play, fun for everyone including the Invader player. It may be a big box, but ***Doom: The Boardgame*** delivers on all seven pounds of its contents.

--*Matthew Pook*

The Desert of No Return: The Takla Makan

*"Here, O Sariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form;
Emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form."*
-- Heart of Perfect Wisdom Sutra (Edward Conze, trans.)

The Buddhist monk Hsuan Tsang repeatedly chanted this sutra as he crossed the Takla Makan desert in 629 A.D. He had to, to drown out the noises and music that followed him across the singing sands of the great waste. He knew that the holy words would keep him safe from the demons and goblins that dwelt in the *Liu Sha*, the Walking Sands. But bisociated just a bit, his sutra might serve equally well to describe the Takla Makan -- emptiness that is form, form that is emptiness. And so, perhaps, Hsuan Tsang was naming the desert, rather than abjuring it; walking and talking into its empty heart, giving the emptiness the form handed down by the Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, and thus mastering it. Not lost yet? Let's go further in.

"But there is a marvellous thing related of this Desert, which is that when travellers are on the move by night, and one of them chances to lag behind or to fall asleep or the like, when he tries to gain his company again he will hear spirits talking, and will suppose them to be his comrades. Sometimes the spirits will call him by name; and thus shall a traveller oftentimes be led astray so that he never finds his party. And in this way many have perished. Sometimes the stray travellers will hear as it were the tramp and hum of a great cavalcade of people away from the real line of road, and taking this to be their own company they will follow the sound; and when day breaks they find that a cheat has been put on them and that they are in an ill plight. Even in the day-time one hears those spirits talking. And sometimes you shall hear the sound of a variety of musical instruments, and still more commonly the sound of drums."
-- Marco Polo, *Travels* (Sir Henry Yule, trans.)

The desert of Takla Makan is approximately the size of New Mexico, and approximately 20 times drier. It lies in the rain shadow of the Kunlun, Karakoram, and Tien Shan Mountains, with the Gobi Desert to the northeast. The Tarim River, fed by glacial snowmelt, runs through it into the salt lake of Lop Nor, which moves around across the desert as the river changes course. (The new Chinese emperors detonate their nuclear weapons in the Lop Nor, hoping to drown out the singing sands -- or to blast open the gates to the Otherworld.) East of Lop Nor is the "Jade Gate" at Dunhuang, which leads to Gansu Province in China proper. From time immemorial, the Silk Road has split at Dunhuang, with branches skirting the Takla Makan on the north (through Turfan, Kucha, and Aksu) and south (through Niya, Khotan, and Yarkand) to reunite on the far side of the desert at Kashgar.

Marco Polo crossed the Takla Makan going the other way in 1273, although he called it the Desert of Lop. He heard the singing sands and buried drums of the desert spirits, calling him deeper into the Takla Makan, or at least heard of them. His caravan tied bells around the neck of each camel, and stayed within eyeshot of each other, and put up signs each night. Nobody quite knows where the word "Lop" came from, and "Takla Makan" gets variously translated as "Place of No Return" (or more colloquially, "you go in, you don't come out") and "Desert of Death." However, the most likely derivation of "Takla Makan" is from the Turkic words for "covered place" or possibly "buried house." Because deep in the Desert of Death are 300 (or 360, depending on the story) cities, buried in the Walking Sands for their iniquities, very like the legendary [Irem](#) of the Pillars.

"Those 'trunks like gravestones' sound eerily like those log circles of prehistoric cemeteries built two thousand years before the Chinese city of Loulan came into being, flourished, and dried up again. Perhaps still older dead forests, visible in prehistoric times, inspired these people to mark the land allocated to their own dead with similar memorials."
-- Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *The Mummies of Ürümchi*

Hsuan Tsang refers to one such doomed city, Ho-lo-lo Kia, which was buried when "on the seventh day, just after the division of the night, it rained sand and earth." Although kings and sultans have tried to retrieve the treasures of these cities, "furious winds" and "dark clouds from the four corners of heaven" confound their efforts. But the barriers to the Takla Makan may have weakened somewhat -- around 1500, the Emir of Kashgar, one Mirza Abu Bakr, launched a successful looting expedition into the Takla Makan near Khotan. In 1865, British surveyor William Johnson entered

the buried city of Rawak, and the Russian botanist Albert Regel discovered the lost city of Karakhota in 1879. Between them (and between 1893 and 1931), Sven Hedin and Sir Aurel Stein uncovered another handful of sites, and (most exciting of all) dug up a number of mummies with unmistakably Caucasian features, red hair, and bright-colored twill plaid cloaks. They had found the lost Tocharian civilization, which had begun with Indo-Iranian migration into the Tarim Basin around 2000 B.C. The Tocharian city-states survived, and even thrived, on the rim of the Takla Makan, digging wells and underground tunnels to irrigate their fragile wheat fields and sheep pastures. Until one day, around 330 A.D., the Tarim River catastrophically changed course, moving 100 miles south of the Tocharian city of Kroraina (Loulan, in Chinese) and leaving the Tocharians to the tender mercies of the Chinese armies and their cities covered by the singing sands of the Takla Makan.

"In summary, important physical properties that distinguish booming sands from their silent counterparts are: high surface smoothness and high-resistance to shear. Other factors that contribute are the roundedness, the sphericity of the grains and differing roughness between the larger grains in the sample. Booming occurs best at very low humidity. . . Booming is enhanced when the grains are loosely packed . . . Effects due to collective or resonant motion are also considered to be important. However, these collective effects are still not well understood . . . How these ingredients mix together to produce booming is still an open problem."

-- Paul Sholtz, Michael Bretz, and Franco Nori, "Sound-Producing Sand Avalanches," in *Contemporary Physics* 38:5

Geologists blandly assure us that "singing sand" (also called "booming sand" or, by geologists of a more poetic turn, "Aeolian sand") is a perfectly natural phenomenon, occurring in silica sand of rounded grains between 0.1 and 0.5 millimeters in diameter, under the correct shear and pressure, during suitably dry, hot weather. The sound, which is often compared nowadays to a "roaring airplane" or a loud radio (or a pipe organ or didjeridoo or a cello), ranges in frequency between 10 and 770 Herz, and in loudness between 90 and 105 decibels. Singing sands have been measured not only in the Takla Makan, but in Nevada, Morocco, Namibia, Hawaii, Scotland, Libya, the Sinai, Pomerania, and Siberia. About 35 places are known to produce singing sands under the right conditions, with some lucky locations (such as southern Morocco) featuring singing sands virtually all day long. Of course, geologists quite frankly admit they're stumped for a cause, murmuring about shear and pressure and friction and wind and occasionally resonance and piezoelectric effects and air cushions. But they know one thing for sure -- it's not ghosts.

"By this you have to cross a plain of sand, extending for more than 100 li. You see nothing in any direction but the sky and the sands, without the slightest trace of a road; and travellers find nothing to guide them but the bones of men and beasts and the droppings of camels. During the passage of this wilderness you hear sounds, sometimes of singing, sometimes of wailing; and it has often happened that travellers going aside to see what those sounds might be have strayed from their course and been entirely lost; for they were voices of spirits and goblins. For these reasons travellers and merchants often prefer the much longer route . . . "

-- Ma Tuan-Lin, *Wen-Hsien T'ung-K'ao*

And yet, ghosts are reported with the same reliability as the noises -- in fact, by many of the same witnesses. In addition to the drums and music and voices, Hsuan Tsang reported "visions of troops marching and halting with gleaming arms and waving banners, constantly shifting, vanishing, and reappearing" and in a Valley of Death in the "Sea of Sand" Father Odoric of Pordenone (who traveled through the East between 1318 and 1330) not only heard "divers sweet sounds and harmonies of music" but saw "swarms of dead bodies" and says intriguingly that "upon a certain stone, I saw the visage of a man, which beheld me with a terrible aspect." But like Hsuan Tsang, Father Odoric repeated a solemn prayer ("the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us") and passed through the Sand unmolested. Philostratus describes how Apollonius of Tyana, having crossed the Indus River (into the Tarim Basin?), saw the "figure of an empusa or hobgoblin that changed from one form into another." This calls to mind, of course, not only the djinn (who appear in sandstorms, of the sort that veil the Takla Makan for 200 days out of the year) but also the *ghulam*, the ghouls of the *Arabian Nights* who shapeshift, and imitate the voices of friends, all to draw you off the path and into the desert to die. The Persians had their own ghouls, the *nesnas*, which had only one arm, one leg, and one eye -- half in this world, and half in the otherworld, in the Desert of Death.

*"Like thunder of deep waters when vast-heaving billows break,
Like soughing of the forest when ten thousand branches shake,
Like moaning of the wind,*

*When the night falls bleak and blind,
So wild and weird the melodies the fairy minstrels make. "*
-- Rev. James Bernard Dollard, "The Fairy Harpers"

Which creature any student of the denizens of the otherworld will also recognize as the fachan, the Irish ogre with one leg, one hand, one eye, and (in some versions) feathers and fur mixed together. (He even has a Mongol-style topknot.) There's even an explicitly desert version, the Direach Glinn Eitidh, which lives in the bleak wastes of the West Highlands -- in fact, hard by the singing sands of Eigg in the Hebrides. Suddenly, from the edge of a Sea of Sand, we reach the edge of the Sea of Salt -- although there's quite a lot of salt in the Takla Makan, arguing that it may have been an inland sea as recently as 3400 B.C. And yet we still have hollow tunnels under the hills, and red-headed, plaid-wearing natives, and the phantom music of the faerie folk. Some Scots claim that the secret of the bagpipes (or at least of the "Londonderry Air") came from the fairy hills, such as the Cnoc-na-piobaireachd, the Knoll of Piping on good old Eigg. Faerie rades ride across Scots moors just as the "troops marched with gleaming arms" beside Hsuan Tsang, and will-o-wisps and redcaps wait to lure travelers off the path and into the emptiness at the heart of nowhere.

"He stood there looking at it, and remembering that the nearest land was America. Not since he had stood in the North African desert had he known the uncanny feeling that is born of unlimited space, the feeling of human diminution. So sudden had been the presence of the sea, and its rage and extent so overwhelming, that he had hung there motionless for several moments before realising that here were the sands that had brought him to the fringe of the western world in March. These were the singing sands."
-- Josephine Tey, *The Singing Sands*

The images pile upon themselves, the forms swallowed in the emptiness of chaos. We have the Tocharians and the Gaels, linguistic neighbors (Tocharian languages are more similar to Gaelic and Welsh than much closer Indo-European tongues) at opposite ends of the continent, sharing phantom music, hollow hills, and demons of the desert. Is the Takla Makan the "desert in the ocean" sought by [St. Brendan](#) the Bold? Do the clouds of Kashgar and the mists of Scotland communicate through an Otherworld threaded by prayer and piping? There are connections across the singing sands to the drowned cities of the [Tir fo Thuinn](#) and the buried ones of Tocharia. (St.-John Philby, likewise, reported singing sands near Wabar -- Irem, to us.) And just how did the Tocharians stay alive on the edge of the Desert of Death? Their mummies clutch ephedra to themselves -- did they truly Awaken and see past the Veil of Illusion that the world saw as a desert? Or did they make some other bargain -- the Chinese records describe the people of Loulan as "resembling birds and wild beasts." The fachan has feathers, the Jibbali of Irem speak "the [language of the birds](#)," a Tocharian text describes its language as the tongue of the "shining ones." Nothing human can live in the Desert of Death. So they had to change. And somewhere the lost Tocharians still wait, across the Takla Makan.

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



The Art of Camouflage

for *GURPS*

by S.E. Mortimer

This work expands upon the Camouflage and Stealth rules as described in *Basic Set Fourth Edition* and removes the inconsistencies apparent in various *GURPS* supplements. The technologies listed near the end of this article are an attempt to standardize those described in other *GURPS* sources and includes some of today's "cutting edge" developments.

Introduction

Camouflage (p. 183) is the skill of concealment. The term comes from the French word *camoufler*, meaning "to blind" or "veil." It involves disguising an object, in plain sight, in order to prevent detection. While the wartime use of camouflage is by no means a modern invention, its importance was emphasized during World War I because of the introduction of the airplane and aerial surveillance. In 1915 the French army created a new unit called *section de camouflage*. These units were largely made up of "camoufleurs" who, in civilian life, had been artists of some kind -- designers, architects, fine artists, and the like. Other countries soon followed suit.

Many of their ideas came from nature. Animals are experts at camouflage -- their coloring often graduates from dark, on their backs, to almost white on their bellies. This is an important property that is very useful in modern camouflage. This gradation from dark to light breaks up the surface of an object and makes it harder to see the object as one thing. The object loses its three-dimensional qualities and appears flat, making it easier to blend into the background. Animals also utilize colors and patterns to further increase their chances of remaining concealed (see *Camouflage Techniques*, below).

Stealth & Camouflage

As stated in *Basic Set* (p. 222), camouflage will not improve your Stealth roll. However, if you are camouflaged, the enemy may overlook you even after you *fail* a Stealth roll. A failed Stealth roll in this instance means that the enemy has detected something unusual and looks more closely to determine what it is. A failed secondary roll (Vision or Observation vs. Camouflage) may convince him that he was mistaken.

Stealth (p. 222): This skill includes moving carefully through shadows, or quickly from one hiding place to the next, to avoid being seen, as well as stepping softly, controlling breathing (including coughing and sneezing), and avoiding noisy obstacles, to avoid being heard. Stealth cannot be used against the sense of smell, nor against most electronic sensors, but some technologies may help in both of these cases. To avoid detection, roll a Quick Contest of Stealth vs. the Sense Roll (p. 358) of whomever you are trying to deceive. This person may choose which sense to roll against (either Vision or Hearing), depending on which is the most likely to succeed *after* all modifiers have been applied. Note that movement is not assumed -- you can use Stealth to stand unnoticed in a closet or behind a curtain, or to remain unseen laying behind a low wall or a log. If the character fails his Stealth roll he may then fall back on his Camouflage skill to save him.

Camouflage (p. 183): The skill of hiding a stationary person, object, or position with some combination of naturally occurring materials (foliage, stones, twigs, etc.) and special nets, paints, and clothing (see *Camouflage Gear*, below). It is only effective against Vision (or Observation). If the enemy has reason to look for the character then roll a Quick Contest of Camouflage vs. Vision or Observation to avoid detection. The Camouflage skill cannot be used if you are moving -- use Stealth instead (see above). "Reason to look" is often a failed Stealth roll resulting in a noise or movement, but it could also mean deliberate noise or simply an observant scout looking for camouflaged targets.

Camouflage has another useful application. Even if the character has been spotted, he is often difficult to see clearly. If the difference in the Quick Contest is *less than* 5 points, then the enemy gets a penalty of -1 for any Ranged attack against this character (in addition to other modifiers).

Modifiers

Some **GURPS** rules give modifiers to the character's Camouflage or Stealth skill. Others give modifiers to the opponent's Vision or Observation skill. To improve simplicity, all modifiers suggested here will be to the *opponent's* Vision roll, not the character's Camouflage roll, since some items affect both Camouflage *and* Stealth skill rolls. Under optimal conditions, it is virtually impossible not to spot the target. Detecting someone standing two yards away in the open in good lighting should be considered automatic. If a roll is required then the **Basic Set** suggests a skill bonus of +10 (p. 345). Add the following modifiers to this base:

Size & Range: The larger an object is, the easier it is to spot. The sentry's Vision roll is modified by the Size Modifier of the object (e.g. a tank with SM +5 gives a +5 Vision bonus to the sentry. Distance also modifies the Vision roll. Use the Range modifiers on the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. 550). E.g. a character attempting to spot a person 10 yards away gets a distance penalty of -4 to his Vision roll for a total of +6 (assuming optimal conditions).

Cover: This is different than covering from physical attacks (pp.B407-408) and involves preparing a camouflaged position. The more time that is spent, the better the camouflage (-1 to -5 to the Vision roll). A quick camouflage job only takes 15 minutes and gives a -1 modifier to the Vision roll. Using the rules for additional time (see *Time Spent*, p.B346), each doubling of the base time increases the modifier by -1. For example, spending 30 mins gives a penalty of -2; spending an hour gives -3; spending two hours gives -4; and spending four hours gives a Vision penalty of -5. A Camouflage skill roll isn't needed until someone attempts to compromise the position, at which point a quick contest (Vision or Observation vs Camouflage) is rolled.

Terrain: Rough terrain makes it more difficult to spot a camouflaged object, modifying the Vision roll anywhere from +0 to -8. Open, barren, flat terrain (or an empty room) would be worth +0. Flat brushland might be worth -3; rocky hills might be worth -5; dense jungle could be as high as -7; sandy desert or a muddy swamp would be -8 if the character completely covered himself with sand or mud.

As stated in **Special Ops**, camouflage or the detection of camouflage is also a matter of familiarity with the terrain. In the Quick Contest to spot a camouflaged target, the less familiar party has a penalty of -1 to -4 (GM's decision). Anyone with 1 point or more in Survival for the relevant terrain is considered to be familiar with it. The GM may also rule on familiarity based on specific Area Knowledge or even the background story of the character (see p.SO59).

Lighting: A light source modifies the darkness in a local area from total darkness (-10) to the modifier specified in the item description. For example, according to p. 394, a torch modifies the darkness penalty to -3. This normally only applies to a radius of two yards around the light. For more on lighting see ["Lighting the Way."](#) Here are the darkness modifiers from that article:

- 0 Well-lit room, Continual Light 3 (p. 249)
 - 1 Bonfire
 - 2 Large campfire, Fireplace, Continual Light 2 (p. 249)
 - 3 Street lights, torch or flashlight (p. 394), Continual Light 1 (B249)
 - 4 Full moon, Light spell (p. 249)
 - 5 Crescent moon
 - 6 Starlight plus faint moonlight
 - 7 Starlight and no moon
 - 8 Lightly overcast starlight and no moon
 - 9 Heavily overcast starlight and no moon
- Very bright light will give *bonuses* to the Vision roll:
- +1 Brightly-lit room; lightly overcast day

+2 Bright daylight; large spotlight

The intensity of light decreases with distance. Use the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. 550) to determine the darkness penalty at any given point. This is done by applying *half* the Range modifier (round up). For example, a target is 15 yards away from a torch (darkness penalty -3). The Range modifier for 15 yards is -5 and half of this is -3 (rounded up). Therefore, the target area has a darkness penalty of -6 (-3 -- 3).

Obstructions: Vision is modified further by obstructions to the Line of Sight (LOS). The more hexes in the LOS that are obscured by the obstruction, the greater the penalty.

-1 per yard	Dense smoke, dense steam
-1 per 5 yards	Dense foliage, water, fog, blizzard
-1 per 20 yards	Heavy rain, light snow
-1 per 50 yards	Light mist, open woods

Other Modifiers

Those who are familiar with camouflage techniques are more adept at spotting camouflaged targets. A character with the Camouflage skill at any level gets a +1 bonus to his Vision or Observation roll (only to spot camouflaged targets). A character with this skill at Expert level (14 or more) gets +2.

-4 for any distraction, including other duties.

Camouflage Techniques

The basic concept of camouflage is simple: determine how your enemy sees you and then mask all factors that make you stand out. There are four main attributes to take into consideration when applying camouflage. Called "the four S's," they are *shape*, *shine*, *shadow*, and *silhouette*. If all of these factors are accounted for, then one is highly unlikely to be spotted through conventional means.

Shape: Most camouflage equipment is designed to address this aspect of concealment. The physical outline (contour) of the body can be disrupted with baggy clothing, netting, etc. But colors and patterns also help to break up a person's shape and help conceal him against the background. Contrast (brightness difference with the background) is the initial detection cue to the human eye. Light-colored camouflage will therefore be of little use in dark, shadowy foliage. It will, however, blend well in rocky, sandy areas, or in dead grass. Light green clothing might, for example, blend well in short, green grass. Pattern is almost as important as color because it is visually disruptive. Mottled and striped camouflage patterns help hide the contour of the body, enabling one to blend into the surroundings. Exposed flesh, like the face and hands, should be covered or painted in the same colors and patterns to complete the effect. See *Camouflage Gear* (below) for various modifiers to skill rolls. Standard American patterns include Woodland (four-color -- one for temperate and one for tropical), Rocky Desert (six-color "chocolate chip"), Sandy Desert (3-color), Urban (four-color), White tundra, and Black. An *inappropriate* camouflage pattern makes the wearer just as obvious as if he were wearing bright clothing, giving a bonus of +1 or more to the enemy's Vision roll.

Shine: The chance glint from a reflective surface is all that is required to tell the enemy exactly where you are -- even if you are miles away. The simple process of applying mud or soot to reflective surfaces (like knife blades, watches, and buckles) is an effective countermeasure. It only takes 10 minutes but, if it is not done, the enemy gets a Vision bonus of +1. This is not much use for glass, however (unless you don't need to see through it). A technology called killFlash™ uses a high-tech (TL8) honeycomb material to provide a retrofittable screen against glint and glare (ideal for telescopic sights and binoculars). Cost is \$50 per lens, or \$500 per square foot.

Black

Contrary to popular belief, black is not the ideal color to wear at night. On most nights, totally black clothing appears as suspiciously dark shadows. Best is a darker shade of the pattern used for daylight

Shadow: Hiding behind a tree doesn't help much if the enemy can see your shadow sticking out. When you take up position, look around to ensure that your shadow won't give you away. It is best to hide in the shadow of a larger object. If that is not possible, then choose a position in which your shadow is hidden from the enemy. The GM should decide whether your shadow might be visible to the enemy and apply an appropriate bonus to his Vision roll based on the terrain and position of any light sources. A human-shaped shadow on a brightly-lit wall could be worth +8. Your profile affects your shadow: lying prone casts no noticeable shadow; crouching reduces the shadow modifier by 1. Remember that even though you may be camouflaged with BDU's and face paint, your shadow is still going to have a human outline. Covering yourself with netting or natural foliage can alter your physical shape making it less distinct, reducing the shadow bonus, but only down to a total of +0; the Shadow bonus cannot be negative.

Silhouette: Do not allow brighter objects behind you -- like the sky (if you are moving over a ridge or log, for instance), sunlit patches, or a lighter colored bush, rock, or field. In such cases the camouflage pattern simply disappears to the human eye, and you appear as a human silhouette (+2 to +6 depending on how bright the background object is). Avoid at all costs being back-lit (+8 to Vision roll). The solution is simple -- stay down. Present a low profile and you are less likely to be spotted. Crouching or kneeling gives -1 to Vision rolls; lying prone gives -2. Large objects carried by the character, such as rifles, give a +1 Vision bonus unless they are either camouflaged or held close to the body to prevent the silhouette from being compromised (a rifle could not be used if held in this manner).

Lying prone is the ideal camouflage position. You get a double bonus: first for not casting a shadow, and second, for reducing the chances of producing a silhouette. An added bonus is that if you are spotted and the enemy shoots at you, he is less likely to hit (see Postures, p. 551).

High-Tech

Traditional camouflage techniques are only useful to hide from conventional visual surveillance. They are much less effective against High-Tech forms of detection such as thermal imaging, radar, and image enhancement. **GURPS World War II** has detailed rules for using traditional detection devices. A recent technology called Hyperspectral Imaging (TL8) renders conventional types of camouflage virtually useless because plastic and other non-natural materials give off a unique spectral signature. Even cut foliage that has been used to hide equipment has a different spectral "fingerprint" than growing vegetation. These devices are not foolproof, however. The weather can be an ally to the camouflager. High-tech devices generally do not perform well in falling rain, snow, or sandstorms (see p. WWII154), and search aircraft may be reluctant to fly in these conditions anyway. An added benefit is that snow or sand covers tracks and muffles noise. Finally, bad weather makes guards and search teams less alert.

High-Tech camouflage equipment has also been developed to counter these new surveillance technologies. Advanced smoke screens consisting of hot particles are useful to counter hyperspectral and thermal imaging, and image enhancement. They are also an effective countermeasure for laser-guided weapons. Steam has been proven effective against thermal imaging and radar. Radar absorbent materials (RAM) and paint (RAP) are also useful. Camouflage technology is always improving. In the last few years, for example, US marines began wearing a digitally designed camouflage pattern that is made of up pixels (see *MarPat*, below). Up close it looks grainy, but from a distance the pattern blends into the scenery much more effectively than earlier camouflage patterns. Other countries -- including Canada, Denmark, and Germany -- have developed similar camouflage patterns.

Camouflage Gear

camouflage. So dark greens, blues, and browns would be best in a forest with deep shadows or for after sunset maneuvers. The advantage of black is that it provides reasonable night-time camouflage for *all* terrains, making it a good general-purpose option. If black is worn instead of a more suitable camouflage pattern, then reduce the Vision penalty by 1. For example (see *Camouflage Gear*, below), a character operating at night, wearing appropriate camouflage clothing, gloves, and face paint, has a Vision penalty of -4. If the same character wore black clothes, gloves and face paint, the Vision penalty would only be -3.

Some of these items are listed in **Special Ops** (p. 103) and **Covert Ops** (p. 52). The more advanced items are covered in **Ultra-Tech**. Each item listed below gives a Vision penalty to anyone using optical means to detect the target. This Vision penalty only applies if the user is motionless. If moving, the penalty is halved (round down).

Regular Clothing (TL0): Wearing clothing that is of a similar color to the background can improve a camouflage attempt. If the arms, legs, and head are covered in similar appropriate colors (or black for night time) then a -1 penalty to Vision rolls apply. Wearing bright clothing or a color that contrasts greatly with the background (or an inappropriate camouflage pattern) actually hinders camouflage giving a bonus from +1 to +3 to Vision rolls. "Distress" colors (such as bright orange or "fluoro yellow") are specifically designed to be spotted (to assist Search and Rescue, for example) and give +4 to Vision rolls regardless of the background.

Hunting Shirt (TL1): This is a primitive version of the "ghillie suit" (below) and consists of a baggy, thigh-length overshirt of durable material with straps, cords, or loops for the attachment of suitable foliage. Fringed sleeves help to break up the silhouette even further and blotchy dye jobs complete the effect. A plain shirt gives a Vision modifier of -1; a dyed one gives -2. This modifier may be improved even further through customization. This requires 20 hours and a Camouflage skill roll. Each point of success reduces the Vision penalty by an additional -1, to a maximum of -3, for a total Vision penalty of -4 or -5. It requires specific preparation with respect to terrain, climate, and season. Just like regular clothing, if the camouflage is inappropriate for the type of terrain then it might give a bonus to the opponent's Vision roll. Cost \$50 (plain), or \$100 (dyed), weight five lbs.

Battle Dress Uniform (TL7): BDUs or "cammies" are standard military camouflage fatigues. Available in a range of colors and patterns for varying types of terrain. For camouflage to be effective, all items of clothing must have the same camo pattern. Treat as ordinary clothing (shirt, pants, hat). -2 to Vision rolls if the pattern is appropriate for the terrain. Cost \$50; weight 3.8 lbs (temperate climate), three lbs (tropical/desert climates). Some BDUs may be customized like the Hunting Shirt (see above) for an additional -1 to -3 Vision penalty.

Modern BDUs (TL8) are also effective at masking IR signatures. The cloth is chemically treated to reduce IR emissions giving a -1 penalty to all rolls to detect the wearer using thermal imaging equipment, or to hit with weapons using IR targeting systems. Frequent laundering diminishes this effect. Cost \$75; weight is unchanged.

Poncho (TL7): A knee-length poncho hides the shape of the body better than BDUs (-3 to Vision rolls) but is a little awkward to manoeuvre in (-1 DX). It is made from light, tough, waterproof fabric providing protection from wind, rain, and dust. It may also be used as a groundsheet or an improvised one-man tent. Several ponchos may be joined together to form a larger tent or to camouflage a large piece of equipment. Cost \$30; weight three lbs. Some may be customized like a Hunting Shirt (see above) for an additional -1 to -3 Vision penalty.

MarPat (TL8): Marine Pattern, or "MarPat" for short, is a digitally designed pixelated or "bitmap" pattern developed to enhance camouflage at longer distances. It melts into the environment, capturing and reflecting light and color from nearby objects. Treat as normal camouflage patterns, but at distances of 50 yards or more it gives an additional -1 penalty to the Vision roll.

Gloves (TL7): 1.5 mm thick, super warm, neoprene "sure-grip" leather palm (DR 1). -1 penalty to Vision roll only if worn in conjunction with camouflaged clothing. Cost \$25; weight 0.5 lbs.

Compact (TL7): Comes with four colors of face paint (different colors for each terrain type), and a mirror. If gloves are not worn then paint can be applied to the hands as well as the face. Time to apply is 10 mins for the face and another 10 mins for the hands. -1 to Vision only if it is used in conjunction with camouflage clothing. Contains enough paint for five applications (only two if applied to the hands as well). Cost \$10; weight 0.25 lbs.

Heat insulating face paints have also recently become available (TL8), giving a -1 penalty to Vision rolls using thermal imaging devices. Cost 4x.

Silver Grease Paint (TL7): Introduced during WWII. Used for camouflage while swimming, -2 to Vision rolls if character is underwater. Contains enough for one application (full body). Price \$2; Weight negligible.

Ghillie Suit (TL6): The ultimate in contemporary camouflage clothing. "Ghillies" were 19th century Scottish gamekeepers who were having trouble with poachers. They discovered that they could camouflage themselves by sewing strips of burlap and other materials to their clothing, and then wait patiently for poachers to come by. As long as they remained still, their quarry would ignore them. The first known military unit to use ghillie suits was the British Lovat Scouts' Snipers, who came across the Scottish ghillies and adopted the concept, adapting it for military use. Ideal for snipers, the ghillie suit received public attention after appearing in movies like *Clear & Present Danger* and *Sniper*. Sometimes called a "walking bush," the ghillie suit is made by adding strips of burlap, camouflage netting, and/or pieces of local foliage to disrupt a person's three-dimensional pattern. Most commercial ghillie suits are specifically designed for lying prone. They are made of Nomex with a durable cloth front and padded elbow and knee protection for crawling. Attached are hundreds of strips of burlap or lengths of twine to give it a "ragged" appearance that helps to break up the contour of the wearer. While most are made for rural environments, some are made for urban use with local "color" such as beer cans, cardboard boxes, and plastic bags added.

A basic Ghillie suit only provides a Vision modifier of -3 but, as with the Hunting Shirt (see above), it can be customized for the local environment -- taking into account the terrain, climate, and season. This requires 20 hours and a Camouflage skill roll. Each point of success reduces the Vision penalty by an additional -1, to a maximum of -5, for a total Vision penalty of -8. Ghillie suits are bulky and hamper movement (-1 DX), and they are very hot (+2 Fatigue - see p. B426). A standard full suit (hood, parka, and trousers) costs \$550 and weighs 16 lbs. Additional customization might bring this weight up closer to 20 lbs.

The most advanced ghillie suits (TL8) are also effective against electronic detection, and are subject to International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR). These suits cost double the normal price and give a -3 penalty to thermal and image enhancing devices. Higher tech versions of the ghillie suit (TL9+) would include more effective technologies to evade high-tech detection.

Netting (TL6): Reversible dual-sided camouflage military netting able to be used in two different terrains. Good for hiding inanimate objects; Vision -3. Netting may be customized like the ghillie suit (above) to improve its camouflage capabilities. It takes five hours per square yard and a Camouflage skill roll. Each point of success reduces the Vision penalty by an additional -1, to a maximum of -5, for a total Vision penalty of -8. Cost is \$5 per square yard. Weight is one lb. per square yard.

Thermal (IR) Camouflage Suit (TL8): Thermal camouflage must not completely conceal the thermal signature of a man or vehicle. If it does, a "black hole" is produced -- an area of cold which stands out against the natural clutter of heat patterns. Complete thermal screening can also act like baking foil, cooking the object in its own heat. This suit is designed to conceal in the infra-red range but allow some heat to escape. This is done by using heat screening panels which have a system of vents, allowing some of the heat to be dissipated and the rest directed into the ground. This is a full suit including hood and gloves, giving a -3 on all rolls to detect the wearer using thermal imaging equipment or to hit him with a weapon that uses infra-red targeting systems. It is camouflaged using a standard pattern (-2 or -3 Vision modifier) and typically worn over normal clothing. It is very light and can be rolled up into a tight bundle. Cost \$150; weight 0.75 lbs.

Thermal (IR) Camouflage Net (TL8): Similar to the thermal camouflage suit, but designed to camouflage large heat-generating objects (such as vehicles and generators). Cost is \$50 per square yard and weight is 0.5 lbs per square yard.

Advanced Thermal Camouflage (TL9): British Telecom is currently working with the military forces of several countries to develop fabric that can change its thickness, and therefore thermal properties, according to the outside temperature. A suit made from this material would be lighter and far more effective against infrared detection devices (-8 to detection by thermal imaging devices).

Odor Retardant Cloth (TL8): The middle layer of this fabric consists of a material, such as charcoal, that absorbs odors, preventing the wearer from being detected by all but the most acute sense of smell. The correct term is "adsorbent" -- the trapping of gas particles via the surface of a solid. Clothing manufactured from this fabric is ideal for hunting and evading guard dogs. It also protects the wearer from chemical weapons (duration 24 hrs only). Over time the adsorbent layer becomes less effective at trapping odors and must be "reactivated". This involves heating the

material up to high temperatures and can be done by simply placing the fabric in a clothes dryer on the highest setting for half an hour or so. It must be done after 200 hours of wear (150 hrs in hot climates). Normally a character receives a -5 penalty when attempting to evade an animal with Discriminatory Smell (see Stealth, p.B222). Odor retardant cloth reduces this penalty to -1. It comes as a liner designed to be worn inside normal camouflage clothing (head, torso and legs). The attached headpiece provides complete head and neck coverage including built-in breath shield. A complete suit costs \$180; weight three lbs.

Scent Neutralizer (TL8): This spray is designed to kill human odor at the molecular level. Sprayed on inner garments, the clothing acts as a filter against body odors preventing detection by all but the most acute sense of smell, reducing Stealth penalties against Discriminatory Smell from -5 to -1. Enough for six applications. Cost \$20, weight 0.25 lbs. Duration 2d hrs (2d-2 hrs in hot climates).

Radar Absorbing Material (TL7): Initially designed for warships and submarines during WWII, radar absorbing material (RAM) became known to the general public during the well-publicized development of modern "spy-vehicles" like the Stealth Bomber. Today RAMs have filtered down to more general military use. RAM is a coating whose electrical and magnetic properties allow absorption of radio or microwave energy. This material does not completely absorb radar but the reflected signal is "muffled," projecting a false image to the radar device. -4 to detection by radar devices.

"Smart" RAM (TL8): Through the application of an electric current, it is possible to vary the radar absorbent properties of this material. Made from high-tech conducting polymers and controlled by a computer, this material can be used to "forge" any sort of radar signature and reflect it back to the radar device, including making it virtually invisible (-9 to detection by radar devices). An object protected by this technology could, for example, alter its signature from an enemy plane to a friendly one, or from a single fighter into an entire squadron.

Dynamic Camouflage (TL9): No need to change your camo fatigues every time the terrain changes. US Defense Advanced Projects Agency is working with Yale University on a "smart shirt." The fabric is impregnated with millions of tiny light-emitting microcapsules and controlled by a computer built into the suit. The computer constantly receives data about the color and texture of the local terrain via micro-sensors and adjusts the colors and pattern accordingly. This allows camouflage to adapt dynamically to the surroundings. Such effects can be achieved in several ways, by physically flattening or stretching capsules to change their color characteristics, or by using electrical charge.

The earliest version of this technology (late TL8?) will have a database of pre-set camouflage patterns. The wearer simply selects the pattern that is most appropriate for his current background. The result of this is essentially the same as MarPat (see above) except that there is no need to change BDUs every time the terrain changes. This is the "Varicloth" technology listed in Ultra-Tech (+200% to clothing cost). The computer database might include a "distress" pattern, which is a solid bright color to aid Search & Rescue. The next step is to incorporate sensors and enhance the onboard computer to analyse the surrounding terrain and automatically select the most suitable pattern. The database of patterns in this instance would likely be more comprehensive than the previous model giving a -4 Vision penalty. The next advance would be to eliminate the database of pre-programmed patterns and generate the pattern "on the fly," creating an almost infinite number of variations to more closely emulate the immediate surroundings. This gives -6 to Vision rolls and visually aimed attack rolls, including laser-guidance systems. This is essentially a light-based analog of the Chameleon Advantage (p. 41). At this level of advancement the technology will also have other abilities such as generating reflect armor or becoming "transparent" -- rendering the material invisible. The final solution would be to display or project a seamless image of the background onto the front of the suit and vice versa. This would provide virtual invisibility (-10 to Vision rolls) if the wearer remains motionless.

The Eyes (see p.CV53)

In order for the wearer of camouflage technology to see, there must be a window at the eyes. A foe can target the eyes with a -9 penalty (p. 399). Seeing the eyes, or targeting the whole body is only at a -5 penalty, because humans and animal nervous systems are extremely sensitive to the vertical symmetry of a pair of eyes -- the "someone's looking at me" feeling. A window over only one eye gives a -10 penalty to see or target the eye or the whole person, but also gives the One-Eye disadvantage (p. 147).

Electrochromic Paint (TL9): Currently in development. The optical properties of this material change with the application of an electric current. An advanced alternative to the Dynamic Camouflage technology described above, it could be painted onto to any item without significantly increasing its weight. A similar version of this technology is the "Liquid Crystal Skin" described in Vehicles (p. VE91). Treat as Dynamic Camouflage (above) except that the cost is doubled and there is no increase in weight for the object to which it is applied.

Refractive Light-Warp (TL10): Sometimes called a "Cloaking device." When electromagnetic radiation (including visible light) strikes a surface, some frequencies are reflected, some are absorbed, and some are transmitted (pass through). Most of the visible light that strikes a sheet of glass, for example, is transmitted, and thus glass is transparent to normal vision. It can only be seen at all because a small amount is reflected back to our eyes. Refraction occurs when electromagnetic (EM) waves transmit from one medium into another (such as visible light from air into water), the resulting change of velocity can also change the direction of travel. For an object to be invisible it needs to either allow *all* EM radiation to be transmitted *through* the object, or it needs be refracted *around* the object. If it simply absorbed EM radiation it would appear as a completely "black" object, leaving it perfectly visible against a "lit" background. Because it is impossible to transmit all frequencies of EM radiation through a physical object, the only alternative is refraction.

The best known example of a refractive device is the one worn in the movie, *Predator*. In theory, this technology might use a multi-frequency electromagnetic field to firstly, prevent reflection of all frequencies of EM radiation that hit a given object, and secondly, to bend all background EM radiation around the object, rendering it almost completely invisible to various detection devices, including eyesight. The downside is that no EM radiation can enter or leave the field, rendering the user completely blind and unable to use technologies like radio communication, unless there is a window for the eyes (see textbox, right). To compensate for this problem, the refractive device can be adjusted to allow certain frequencies through the field. For example, if radio waves are "permitted" then radio communication becomes possible, but the user is now susceptible to detection by some types of radar. If the device stops all but the infra-red spectrum then the object will only be visible to someone with a thermal imaging device. The user must also have a similar device to be able to see out (such as the headset worn by the "Predator").

A Refractive Light-Warp device gives a penalty of -10 to Vision rolls and visually aimed attack rolls, including laser-guidance systems. If in melee combat, active defenses and attack rolls are at -3 but the attacker cannot aim at a specific body location. The field can be set to cover an object of any size. The larger the field, the greater physical size of the refractive device, and power source that is required.

If the technology isn't extremely precise it will result in a fringe of distortion or a rainbow-like halo around the user. The field might also be adjustable, allowing some light through. This would result in a translucent or shadowy figure that the enemy can aim for. In this case, his own Vision rolls, his opponent's Vision rolls to see him, and their attack rolls to hit him would all suffer the same penalty -- anywhere from -1 to -9 depending on how much light was allowed through.

Determining Camouflage Bonus

The above suggestions include an enormous amount of modifiers to calculate before rolling a Quick Contest to see if the camouflage succeeds. Here is a summary:

- Base modifier of +10 to Vision or Observation roll
- Range & Size (Speed/Range chart)
- Cover (terrain and camouflage attempts)
- Equipment modifiers
- Shine, Shadow, Silhouette
- Lighting
- Obstructions
- Other (distractions, etc.)

Example: Sneaky Sam is wearing a Ghillie suit that he customized himself and face paint for a total Vision penalty of -7. He is crawling on his belly through light scrubland. The GM rules that the terrain provides a Vision penalty of -4 and an additional -1 penalty per 50 yards for obstructions. That morning Sam spent 10 mins applying soot from his campfire to all reflective surfaces. It is a sunny day (+2 lighting modifier) but, being prone, he casts no noticeable shadow. Sam is trying to sneak up closer to Eagle-eye Jim, who is on guard 50 yards away.

In order to spot Sam, Jim can roll a quick contest against his Vision vs Sam's Stealth. Because Sam is moving, only half the camouflage modifiers apply. Starting with +10, Jim adds -3 (ghillie suit and face paint), -8 (distance), -4 (terrain), -1 (obstructions), +0 (no reflections), +0 (no shadow), +0 (no silhouette), -2 (prone), and +2 (lighting), for a total Vision penalty of -4. The two characters roll a Quick Contest and Jim wins by 2. He thinks he might have seen something and takes a closer look. Sam stops moving and lies still. Jim needs to roll again, this time against Sam's Camouflage skill.

Jim looks through his binoculars that grant three levels of Telescopic Vision (p. 92). This reduces the distance penalty from -8 to -5. The Vision penalty needs to be recalculated: +10 (base), -7 (camouflage), -5 (distance), -4 (terrain), -1 (obstructions), -2 (prone), +2 (lighting) for a total of -7. Jim also knows a little about camouflage and so gets an additional +1 to his roll. Jim loses the Quick Contest and cannot see Sam. If Sam starts moving again, Jim will get another chance to spot him when he gets closer.

Pyramid Review

Five Nations (for Eberron)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Bill Slavicsek, David Noonan, Christopher Perkins, Brian Campbell, Scott Gearin, & Kolja Raven Liquette

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160-page full-color hardback, \$29.95

By degrees, Wizards of the Coast is mapping out the lands of their Eberron setting. They worked up a single city in heavy detail with *Sharn: City of Towers*, but doing one town at a time isn't going to get the job done. *Five Nations* is a good start to a broader perspective on these lands.

The title refers to the five core nations that long ago split over the issue of royal succession and continued discussing the problem with a vicious war that ravaged the continent. Now that the Treaty of Thronehold has -- if not returned everything to normal -- at least placed it in a tenuously peaceful holding pattern, the book catches readers up on what things are like in those prime locations. Each chapter covers details both little and big. We get a thumbnail of the country's disposition when it was part of the single nation of Galifar, an idea of the sorts of problems it suffered during the Last War, and a peek at its current outlook. This includes its relations with (read: schemes against) its new "friends."

On the personal level, we find out what kinds of people populate each land and what their culture consists of. The food, the dress, the names and nomenclature, all these things paint a picture of daily life and give players an overall impression of how their characters should be portrayed. Each chapter has organizations, towns, guilds, government agencies, historical sites, monsters (used to highlight the material and not as filler), and prestige classes, presented in a succinct manner. There are elite soldiers, bone knights (for those who find the straight-up paladins creatively stifling), and spies, among others. Like the creature write-ups, these just give you a taste of the nation's leanings. Only Thrane has new spells, if that's important to you, most related to fire for the benefit of the Silver Pyromancer.

Although everyone engages in espionage on their neighbors, Aundair defines the art. The queen rules through guile as well as strength, and plots swirl about like buzzing gnats. Breland is about as idealized a fantasy setting as the quintet has to offer, with a respected and aging king who seeks peace for his people; but the Brelish enjoy a land of plenty and their boundless resources make them best prepared to prosecute a war should hostilities flare again. The Mournland is all that's left of Cyre, victim of a great upheaval that destroyed the country and killed most everyone in it. They are now outcasts who have found succor only in Breland, but this hasn't dampened their desire for revenge against whoever's responsible. Karnath as a political entity is as rough as the land it occupies, and their warlike abilities are infamous (and reflected in their use of undead in their armies). Thrane is a theocracy, with the church taking over and relegating the monarchy to a nominal position in the running of the country.

The artwork is pretty dark stuff, but then so is the text it accompanies. It might have helped to get more mood-setters in the mix, but instead it's formulaic. Just about every piece illustrates something from the nearby text. The art notes must have read like a recipe, because the two facets are in lockstep. Still, it's evocative work, and the quality of both the art and the maps is not to be sneered at.

The editing, on the other hand, might be. The worst editing on a Wizards project is better than the best editing on just about anyone else's effort, but for whatever reason they slipped up here. It's not a devastating blow, but by ***Dungeons & Dragons*** standards it's positively sloppy. This extends to some layout issues as well, like charts with text cut off and the occasional lack of consistency in presentation. The back of the book lists the usual complementary volumes the DM and players ought to have to use this one, but they didn't suggest ***Monster Manual III***. It won't kill you to make your own substitutions on the encounter charts, but given how many times they reference that book they could've plugged their own work one more time.

Lest you think the whole thing's a drippy mess, it has what the reader needs. There are plenty of plots to fuel PC interactions, creatively snuck in, and they can be played out as different angles depending on which country (and which side) you find yourself working for. The NPCs are lively, the settings are active, the world is made to feel fun, and the players get to feel like heroes.

Not nearly as dry as the core campaign setting, ***Five Nations*** manages to put you in these nations without placing you back in social studies class. The need to impart the vital statistics doesn't hamper the ease of use or absorption of the material. This book capably expands the horizons not just of the campaign background but of the people meant to be a part of it.

--Andy Vetromile

Congratulations, Cog #24601, You're Working For FriendlyCo!

If all goes according to plan, this will be the first column I've composed entirely on my laptop, having been written across three different operating systems on one machine. If all does not go according to plan, this will be the first column I've composed entirely on my laptop, only to have it become trapped on that device with no means of escape.

I'm writing this column on my lunch break with my brand-new laptop, having somehow convinced my wife that it would be a good idea to spend \$850 so I can be more productive on a temp job that will net me about \$1,200. Hopefully she's let her *Pyramid* subscription lapse, so she won't learn about how I also traded our IRAs for magic beans.

Anyway, this is my first real exposure to a real corporate office, complete with real check-in procedures, real security badges, and real tough policies regarding security, information, and confidentiality; the latter made me afraid that, if I didn't clear with them my desire and intention to write on my laptop during my lunch break, a large white weather balloon would swoop down and engulf me.

I'm still coming to grips with the scale of the business world; I was quite unprepared my first day for when I got to the "welcome center," and learned that the various other buildings surrounding this one were, in fact, all part of the same company. Really, working here has helped me understand the scope of bureaucracy better. To help put this in some perspective, let's take a moment to think of a good, solid real-world example.

According to my [insider information](#), the original Death Star had a full crew of 774,576. In comparison, the crew complement of your standard aircraft carrier is 5,000 or so. Now, in the past I learned that -- visions of *Top Gun* notwithstanding -- the bulk of the crew of a standard carrier is *not* there to fly planes and trade quips. No, over half of the crew is designed purely for support of those in the planes. For example, on an episode of [This American Life](#) I heard one interview with someone whose primary job was to refill the snack machines aboard the *USS John C. Stennis*.

Now, let's assume for a moment that the Death Star is roughly analogous to an aircraft carrier, since it sends out swarms of ships to get shot. (In reality the Death Star is more of an amalgam between an aircraft carrier, a battleship, and the AT&T logo.) Using our good friend "Mr. Ratio" (rhymes with "patio"), we learn that there are about 155 people aboard the Death Star whose sole responsibility is to refill the vending machines. Let's break it down into gaming terms. If you were aboard the Death Star, and in your wanderings you sent a stray blaster bolt into a nearby vending machine which incurred the wrath of the Venders Guild, a group of individuals 30 times larger than a typical gaming group could be brought to bear against you.

In short, the more people who amass, the larger the number of people necessary to handle the bureaucracy associated with that gathering. (Of course, this assumes there's a need, desire, and will to handle that mass. Many third-world cities have populations the size of the Death Star many times over, yet have nowhere near that battlestation's bureaucratic sophistication. On the other hand, it's also about 42% less likely that Mexico City would explode to nothingness if a womprat-sized bolt were to plow into its exhaust port.)

This is where the power of bureaucracy-related skills can really pay off. To make this point, I have a new theory: Finding out a piece of information as a "know-nothing" (for instance, working as a temp in a large organization, and not knowing which person you're supposed to call) about another organization will take a number of seconds equal to the number of people working there. Thus finding out -- say -- the fax number at the business of my old Tallahassee job would've take about 15 seconds, since there are about 15 people there. Finding out the same fax number from Dell Computer, which has 55,200 employees, would take approximately 15 hours. And discerning the same fact about Wal-Mart would take just shy of 20 days straight (two months if you limit yourself to an eight-hour day).

The sad part is, as best I can tell, most people involved in a bureaucracy generally *want* to help (or, at least, they'd be

willing to foist you off to the right person if only to get rid of you). But the nature of many bureaucracies stymies most attempts at direct aid, since no one knows the full picture. Most people don't even know the fringes beyond their own piece of the puzzle. It's like a gear on the inside of the clock trying to understand what time it is; a bureaucracy may understand its ultimate purpose ("license all motor vehicle operators in the state," "provide relief to the poor," or "structure a company's growth"), but it probably can't tell you the state of either of the three hands at any given time.

Given what's been written about the nature of bureaucracies in the past, I suspect it may always be such. Perhaps not; it might be interesting to posit a futuristic society whose greatest accomplishment isn't faster-than-light travel or matter manipulation, but a social organization which is able to achieve its purpose with maximum efficiency and minimal loss.

But, having spent a week wrapped around the cogs, I suspect that faster-than-light travel is a bit more likely. After all, I suspect it's easier to work around the laws of physics than to maneuver around human nature.

--*Steven Marsh*

Friday Night Memetics

for *Transhuman Space*

by Jonathan Souza

From the Comparative Journal of Memetics, June 11, 2100 Edition -- "Memes to Watch For" Section

. . . these six memes have been identified as being fairly current, having either resumed an appearance and/or showing up since the last edition.

It should be noted that the memes listed here are not complete, but these have been fully researched and analyzed.

The Argus/Aegis Conspiracy

Classified as a Conspiracy/Concealment meme, believers in this memetic complex state that a long-term conspiracy believe that a group -- alternately called Argus or Aegis -- has been "keeping secrets" about extra-terrestrial life, paranatural/supernatural phenomena, and psionic technology away from people. While this might seem to be a memetic spur from the Alien Visitation meme (p. TH:TM70), meme believers believe in a large-scale conspiracy that has kept things away from the public view.

Meme debunkers face the fact that meme-complex believers will note that the conspiracy can't control everything -- but can do damage control at times -- and may let things "slip out" that are so unbelievable that it helps to debunk the possibility of the conspiracy. They note factors such as JFK's "magic bullet" cannot have its ballistics confirmed by even the most powerful SAI, the "sooperpets" phenomena, the debunking of the Atlantis "discovery" in Antarctica with ground-penetrating radar (usually with the reply that several ancient cities were discovered that were not found by ground-penetrating radar), and several others.

Memetic connectors for engineering include:

Adventure Seed: The players are investigating something . . . and stumble across the conspiracy. The closer the encounter, the more danger the players could be in, especially if Argus (**GURPS Black Ops**) or Aegis (**GURPS Conspiracy X**) have access to brain-hacking technology.

Furry Life

Classified as a Society/Sexual/Operational meme, it is believed that with advanced biotechnology, fully anthropomorphic beings with human/animal characteristics can be created. An offshoot of the "furry" fandom of the late 20th/early 21st century, Furry Life believes in embracing characteristics of "smart animals" that are not entirely derived from human cultural and social mores. Some of the most popular types of animal societies are wolf, cat, and fox-derived, all showing a variety of characteristics.

Meme believers tend to be ghosts or SAIs using bioshells for meme satisfaction. More human-based believers use slinky linkages, usually on rented bioshells. A few experimental bioroid communities are believed to have been created, but it's unknown where and how.

Memetic connectors for engineering include:

Adventure Seed: Players are a community of anthropomorphic bioroids living on a domed colony "somewhere." They believe humans are a myth . . . until the very rich and very old man that created the colony on Mars dies, and as a part of his will, the bioroids are given a money stipend and EU citizenship. Their life a lie, they have to now make a life

for themselves . . . in the mythical human society.

Core Battler Interstella

The massive multiplayer wargame Core Battler Interstella, created by Software Systems International, has been the subject of many questions about its memetic suitability. Classified (tentatively) as a National/Patriotic meme, the three major sides in the game have a large amount of synergy to current political situations, and each side requires a side to develop its skills to defeat its enemy.

An example is the Union Group, which has comparisons to the United States of America (high technology, middle-level military capability, with good research capabilities), which has to use technological advantages until the popular front on Union worlds can be mobilized for warfare. Some small advantages for innovative players have been discovered favoring the Union side over the other two factions.

Possible memetic connectors for engineering include:

Adventure Seed: The players have been invited to play in a Core Battler Interstella tournament on Mars. There has been a lot of side betting . . . and some of the Tongs aren't above cheating or trying to hack the software to get advantages for their side. Or a little bit of leg and body-breaking work . . .

Dark Court

A Society/Enforcement meme, the Dark Court is an urban legend about AIs that "police their own." It is always them, or they -- but once, "they" broke a SAI that played too fast and loose with people's secrets and its mind was destroyed. Or, they made a particularly notorious SAI donate time and effort to help people -- or face serious consequences. Believed to be a kind of reputation network, the "Dark Court" seems to act rarely -- but never capriciously. Nor does it seem to be bound by political boundaries -- several Chinese SAIs have been "judged" for acts it caused to Duncanite groups.

Who is a part of the Dark Court, how cases are chosen, and how they are punished are unknown. Apparently, the cases are all handled "in-house," and no biological involvement occurs. There is supposed to be an appeals method -- but it's unknown how this would work out in theory.

Memetic connectors for engineering include:

Adventure Seed: The players are confronted by a SAI, whom needs their help. Somebody has reported it to the Dark Court for a crime, and it needs the player's help to clear it of the charges, before something awful happens to it. The players have a limited time to clear it, and find some way to get in touch with the Dark Court -- a group that is notorious for avoiding any contact with humans in these affairs.

The Drive Secret

Too many people look at the Shezbeth Black Hole (pp. THS23, 49-50; THS:DB135) as a mystery to be explored and discovered. Some people believe that the Shezbeth Black Hole is an alien artifact that is being concealed by "the powers that be" to hide their own relationships with aliens.

A few thing the Black Hole was due to a failure of technology.

The "Drive Secret," as this Conspiracy/Technology memetic block is called, is that during the Pacific War, somebody was working on an exotic drive system. Theories range from the TSA, to China, to Duncanites, to private companies. All have one thing in relation -- which the drive was a gravity drive that could propel a ship indefinitely while requiring only power to operate. The Shezbeth Black Hole was due to an accident with the drive -- one that was so bad that the project was abandoned. Only recently has an attempt to create the drive again been underway. Where the drive

is being tested is unknown -- the most common theories of where it's being worked on is Titan, under USAF supervision, or somewhere near Jupiter under PRC control.

Memetic connectors for engineering include:

Adventure Seed: Players are spies, freelance investigators, and/or company "procurement agents" whom are seeking out the secrets of the gravity drive -- if one really exists. This is a game of cloaks and daggers -- which might only end when the secret is truly revealed.

Stats for the experimental gravity drive, if it truly exists: For each space of drive, it generates 10 points of thrust, has 4 tons of mass, costs three million dollars, requires one megawatt of power, and no fuel. For each hour of drive operation, roll three dice. If the dice come up any three identical numbers, the drive breaks down for 1D hours. If the dice come up all ones, the drive catastrophically fails, destroying the ship and everything contained in it.

Transendent Sapiency

This meme, classified as an AI/Expansion meme, states that the reason why a truly "superhuman" mind hasn't been reached is because the limitation is that AIs haven't become human yet -- so they can't transcend. They can fake being human, they can fake emotions, they can fake being "real," but they aren't . . . really.

Transcendent Sapience believers suggest that what is needed is a Ghost that can reach the level of Sapient AI-level capacity, or a SAI that has been raised without any possibility of it believing that it is anything other than human. In both cases, it must transcend its limitations -- the Ghost by forsaking the simulation of its body while the SAI must grow beyond being a "mere" program. It is unknown at this time what would be needed, but such a thing might be possible.

Adventure Seed: Some member of the Trojan Mafia has developed a program with which transcendence could be reached. It requires a SAI and a Ghost to "fuse" into a single data entity, effectively destroying both while creating an entirely new being. The players are after the software to purchase it, but the programmer is on the run. Why he's running and how to find him becomes the issue of the players.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Giving Clerics the Edge

by S.E. Mortimer

"Why can't my cleric use a sword in battle?"

This question is frequently asked by newbies to some roleplaying systems. Often the player has a cleric character forced upon him so the other players' characters can have more "active" roles in the fighting. The player wonders why his cleric can't have a sword or a bow like all the other characters. The short answer to the above question is, "Because the rules in your particular roleplaying system say you can't." This is all quite reasonable if that is as far as it goes. Arbitrary limitations can be useful for game balance, ensuring that one class isn't more powerful than the others. However, it does not seem reasonable if history is used as justification for the limitation when, in fact there was no such historical precedent. The previously-mentioned justification allegedly comes from *Canon Law* injunctions against members of the clergy from shedding blood on the battlefield. This essay will examine whether some sort of injunction was ever placed on members of the clergy of Western Europe from shedding blood in battle and whether blunt weapons were ever used to circumvent this injunction.

As previously noted, there is a supposed tradition in which members of the clergy were not permitted to shed blood with their own hands. The Church did make numerous attempts to prevent clerics from engaging in war. The wearing of swords, daggers, and military dress were repeatedly forbidden. The clergy was permitted to encourage others to fight (if the cause was just), but because the Church considered herself "the mother of all Christians" she didn't consider it proper to shed the blood of her "children." Many modern commentators have interpreted this to mean that a cleric could still enter battle and fight so long as he used a weapon that didn't shed blood. However, there doesn't seem to have been any historical precedent for this.

St. Augustine of Hippo (fifth century AD) seems to have been the first to attempt to justify the use of bloodshed under certain circumstances and invents the concept of *justum bellum* ("just war"). He concluded that violence may be used, albeit reluctantly and in a limited manner, if the cause was righteous:

"Among true worshippers of God those wars are looked on as peacemaking which are waged neither from aggrandisement nor cruelty, but with the object of securing peace, or repressing evil and supporting the good."

However, there is nothing in Augustine's work that differentiates between fighting in battle, shedding blood, and killing. In other words, according to Augustine, Christians could fight in combat and shed blood if their cause was just. However, he also states that fighting for God wasn't the highest calling, and that a Christian who abstains from violence, who lives a life of contemplation and prayer, is most revered by God.

St. Cuthbert was a monk when he participated in the battles against King Penda of Mercia in the mid seventh century. He wielded a spear, not a mace, and kept this weapon with him when he rode into Mailros after the great battle at Winwidfield. St. Emilian was a bishop who wielded a sword and led an army against the Saracens at Autun in 725. He was never rebuked for this bloodshed, but instead credited with helping to save Christianity from the Moslem threat and, like Cuthbert, was later canonized into sainthood. Later in the eighth century, during the reign of Charlemagne, it is clear that the Frankish king expected his bishops to muster and lead troops in battle just like all his other vassals. There is nothing to suggest that these clergymen used anything other than the weapons used by all Frankish nobility -- swords, spears, lances, and bows -- and there is nothing to suggest they were ever criticised for it by the Pope. In fact, their violence was encouraged by the papacy because the Franks were bringing pagan peoples under the dominion of the Church. A later example of a warrior priest is Bishop Michael of Regensburg, who led troops and actively fought against the Magyars at Lechfeld in 955. Another is Bruno, Bishop of Toul (later to become Pope Leo IX) who commanded an army and participated in the fighting in Lorraine in 1026. Both of these clerics wielded lances and swords, not maces.

In the Song of Roland, Turpin (Turpin), the archbishop of Rheims, is depicted wielding a mace. The Bayeux Tapestry

depicts bishop Odo (Odon de Conteville), Duke William's half-brother, wielding a club at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Some have used these two examples as evidence to suggest that by the 11th century there must have been some injunction against clerics shedding blood in battle. There are, however, problems with both of these examples. First, Archbishop Turin is also described wielding a spear ("And the Archbishop lays on there with his spear," -- CXXVII.1682). Second, William (later King William I of England) is also depicted wielding a club similar to Odo's on the Bayeux Tapestry. Seeing as though William was not a member of the clergy, one could conclude that the club was some sort of symbol of authority during this time, not a means of circumventing some fanciful injunction against using edged weapons. This is supported by the fact that Odo was in charge of ruling England when William was out of the country. Consider also that Odo was known for his atrocities and bloodshed when he personally suppressed several uprisings in the north in later years -- demonstrating that, regardless of which weapon he used, the good Bishop had plenty of blood on his hands. Finally, one should take into account Odo's sacrilegious despoiling of the Cathedral at Durham in 1074, suggesting that he had little regard for religious sensitivities. Taking all this into consideration, it is unreasonable to suggest that Odo wielded a club at Hastings because of some theological obligation to avoid bloodshed. It was Odo who commissioned the Bayeux Tapestry and he appears almost as often as William himself. It is highly likely that he depicted himself wielding a club because he considered himself William's equal in terms of status and authority.

Keep in mind that there are plenty of examples of knights (who presumably were not under any religious injunction regarding bloodshed) wielding blunt weapons in combat. The primary type of armor worn by the upper class of the time was the mail hauberk, and the best weapon to use against a foe so armored is one that inflicts concussion damage -- weapons like maces, clubs, axes, and the like. One might conclude that some bishops elected to wield maces for the same reason as anyone else -- because they were effective against mail armor, not because canon law required it.

In the 12th century, St. Bernard of Clairvaux agreed with Augustine that it was perfectly acceptable to shed blood if the cause was just. During this time there were the monastic orders such as the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller. Later monastic orders include the Teutonic Order in Germany and the Order of Swordbrothers in Livonia. Technically, members of these military orders were clerics and yet they had the full sanction of the Church to wield swords and shed blood. Wimund, an English bishop in the mid-12th century, was wounded by a hand axe thrown by a Scottish bishop who objected to Wimund's demand for tribute. Another example is Absalon, a Danish archbishop who personally led and fought in many battles from 1160 to 1184 to free Denmark from German rule. His statue in Copenhagen depicts him wielding an axe, not a mace. In 1171, Archbishop Christian of Mainz, was given the command of an army in the Lombard war and is said to have personally killed nine foes. In 1219 King Valdemar II of Denmark and Archbishop Andrew of Lund led a crusade into Estonia. Andrew wielded an axe and a spear. Another incident is at the Battle of Mansourah in 1250. Lord Joinville described a priest named John of Voysey who donned helmet, gambeson, and spear, and single-handedly routed eight saracens. The bishop was perfectly prepared to fight with an edged weapon and to shed blood if necessary.

Caesar of Heisterbach reported the conversation of a Paris clerk, who said that no German bishop could be saved because they "carried both swords, waged wars, and were more concerned about the pay of soldiers than the salvation of the souls committed to them."

The Battle of Bouvines in 1214 depicts a mace-wielding cleric. William of Breton describes the actions of the Philippe de Dreux, Bishop of Beauvais:

"Indeed, the Bishop of Beauvais . . . became unhappy, and since by chance he happened to have a mace in his hand, hiding his identity of bishop, he hits the Englishman on the top of the head, shatters his helmet, and throws him to the ground forcing him to leave on it the imprint of his whole body. And, since the author of such a noble deed could not remain unnoticed, and since a bishop should not be known to have carried arms, he tries to hide as much as possible and gives orders to John . . . to put the warrior in chains and to receive the prize for the deed. Then the bishop, throwing down several more men with his mace, again renounces his titles of honor and his victories in favor of other knights so as not to be accused of having done work unlawful for a priest, as a priest is never allowed to be present at such encounters since he must not desecrate either his hands or his eyes with blood. It is not forbidden, however, to defend oneself and one's people provided that this defense does not exceed legitimate limits . . .

Some have claimed that this is yet another example of a bishop wielding a mace in battle because of the alleged injunction against shedding blood, but the above text makes it clear that it was considered improper for a bishop to participate in battle *at all* regardless of whether he used a blunt weapon or not, unless it was for a just cause. Bishop Philippe even attempted to hide his identity -- not the actions of one who thought the Church would look favorably on his actions. After attention was drawn to him, he attempted to mitigate his actions by refusing to accept credit for his valor nor any ransom from his victims, hoping to avoid criticism from his peers. It seems clear that the Bishop of Beauvais thought he was doing wrong by participating in the battle even though he was wielding a blunt weapon.

It would seem that there were two opposing points of view in the theological debate regarding clerics participating in battle. One side claimed that it was improper for members of the clergy to take up arms at all. The other claimed that it was permissible if the cause was just (some argued that shedding the blood of non-Christians was fine but not Christians). There is nothing up to this point to suggest that anyone supported the proposition of clerics fighting in battle providing that they did not shed blood. In the last half of the 13th century, St. Thomas Aquinas considered the two opposing points of view and attempted to finally solve the dilemma in a work titled *Summa Theologiae*. In this work he draws upon many prominent thinkers including Aristotle, Peter Lombard, Dionysius, Rabbi Moses, and Augustine. Aquinas introduces the concept of "non-combatants," and said that a member of the clergy had permission to be on the battlefield, but he could not actively fight. Thomas wrote that war is forbidden to a cleric because war is secular in nature and it was beneath the clergyman to engage in such "earthly" practices. He further states that they should not "slay or shed blood," because they would become tainted and no longer capable of performing their primary duty as a member of the Church, i.e. "ministry of the altar." If Thomas' words were interpreted literally, one could conclude that a clergyman might actively engage in warfare so long as he didn't shed blood and he didn't kill anyone. Wielding a blunt weapon might conceivably be a means of conforming to this doctrine -- so long as nobody was killed by it. Of course, Thomas' words must be taken out of context in order to justify active participation in battle. One needs to ignore the rest of Thomas' argument which states that members of the clergy had permission to be on the battlefield, but *only* so they may administer to the other participants. Thomas specifically wrote that it was "an abuse of this permission if any of them take up arms themselves." Reading Thomas' work in its entirety, it seems clear that clerics did not have permission to actively participate in battle -- regardless of whether they shed blood or not.

Since this author can find no other article in canon law that might be used to suggest that clerics were permitted to participate in battle but not to shed blood, in order to continue with our examination it is necessary to assume that Aquinas' work (13th century) is the relevant text, and that the Church used this text to grant permission for members of the clergy to participate in battle, so long as they didn't shed blood. Taking this assumption, the next step is to determine how closely this doctrine was followed and how seriously the Church viewed infractions. If there was such an injunction then it is logical to assume that the Church would reprimand any who transgressed. So what about clerics who engaged in battle after the publication of Aquinas' work? Did clerics refrain from using edged weapons in combat, and if they did not, did the Church punish them?

There is a strong tradition of warrior bishops in the English see of Durham. Their coat of arms included a crozier crossed with a sword instead of the usual pair of croziers. Many of them rode to battle and actively participated in the fighting both before and after the work of Aquinas. At the Battle of Falkirk in 1298, Anthony Bek, the Archbishop of Durham, led the second column of Edward's host. He was actively involved in the fighting, having led his column against the Scottish left flank. He wielded a lance and a sword like the other knights under his command. Another was Thomas de Hatfield (Bishop of Durham, 1345-1381) who also wielded a lance and sword in battle. This prowess in battle was expected and there is nothing to suggest that the Church criticised their actions. The following excerpt is from the *Ballad of Durham Field* (fought in 1346) and describes the Bishop of Durham and five hundred of his priests wielding edged weapons in the battle (the bishop wields an axe and the priests have spears):

*Five hundred priests said mass that day
In Durham in the field,
And afterwards, as I hard say,
They bare both spear and shield. [XLIV]
The Bishop orders himselfe to fight,
With his battell-axe in his hand;
He said, 'This day now I will fight*

As long as I can stand!' [XLV]

At the Battle of Crecy in the same year (1346), Edward III had to restrain one of his bishops from entering the fray, but later relented and allowed the bishop to satisfy his bloodlust (under the pretense that he wanted to protect the king's son). At the Battle of Otterburn in 1388, Froissart mentions William of North Berwick, a Scottish deacon who distinguishes himself with a battleaxe. This man was not chastized for his actions, but promoted for his valor to the position of Archdeacon of Aberdeen.

Finally we come to Pope Julius II, who campaigned extensively to increase the papacy's temporal power. His militancy began as an Archbishop when he was sent to lead an army to restore the papal authority in Umbria in 1474. He succeeded in reducing several towns. In 1506 he personally directed the campaigns against Bologna and Bentivogli and set out at the head of his army with a lance and a sword. In 1510-11 he once again took personal command of his army and set out at its head to do battle with the King of France in Northern Italy. It is said that when he commissioned Michelangelo to sculpt a bronze statue of himself and was asked if he would like to be depicted with a book in his left hand, the Pope replied, "Why a book? Show me with a sword."

It has been shown that there is little to suggest that there was ever an injunction placed on the clergy that permitted them to engage in battle so long as they did not shed blood. Priests were either forbidden from fighting *at all*, regardless of what weapon they used, or they could fight, with any weapon, so long as their cause was "just." Even if one wants to argue in favor of such an injunction, it is evident that it was widely ignored. There are many examples of clerics using edged weapons in battle and no evidence that any of these men were ever chastized by their superiors. In fact, they were often promoted afterwards. So, if a gaming cleric wants to wield a sword, and the GM is agreeable, go for it. He will have plenty of company among the ranks of his fellow church members.

Pyramid Review

Iron Kingdoms Character Guide: Full-Metal Fantasy Volume 1 (for the *d20 System*)

Published by [Privateer Press](#)

Written by Rob Baxter, Brian Gute, Chad Huffman, Joe Martin, & Doug Seacat with Brian Brousseau, Colin Chapman, Jason Dawson, Chris Gunning, Brett Huffman, James Maliszewski, Martin Oliver, Phil Reed, Bryan Steele, Jon Thompson, & Michael Tresca

Cover by Matt Wilson

Illustrated by Brian "Chippy" Dugan, Jeremy Jarvis, Torstein Nordstrand, Brian Snoddy, & Matt Wilson

Cartography by Todd Gamble

402-Page Black & White Hardback; \$39.99

One of the more distinctive fantasy campaign settings for the *d20 System* is Privateer Press' Iron Kingdoms, a world in which magic, science, and technology not only sit side-by-side, but complement each other. First seen in the [Witchfire Trilogy](#) adventures, the roleplaying aspects of the intellectual property has seen little support bar the excellent [Monsternomicon - Volume I: Denizens of the Iron Kingdoms](#) and the useful [Lock & Load: Iron Kingdoms Character Primer](#). This is in part due to the publisher concentrating on the wargaming aspect with *War Machine* and its accompanying miniatures range, plus the need to rework the planned RPG supplements to *d20 System 3.5*. The problem has been the lack of information to create characters fully suited to the setting. The *Character Primer* went some way to address this problem, but it was only a start. Thankfully, the release of *Iron Kingdoms Character Guide: Full-Metal Fantasy Volume 1* goes not just *some* way, but all the way to address this lack.

All five books released to date have been good looking affairs, but the *Character Guide* is the best looking. At first glance, the matte finish cover and the lack of glossy pages lend it a rough appearance, but the illustrations are never less than excellent, and the writing and layout are both crisp. In particular, the depiction of the setting's equipment is a delight. Throughout, the dry game information is supplemented by sections of color text providing in-game commentary and occasional rumors for use during play. These further help impart the feel of the setting.

The *Character Guide* is a big book and covers a great deal across its five pages. It opens with an introduction to the world of Caen, home to the continent of Western Immoren, the focus for both RPG and wargame. It starts by placing Caen in both the universe and its solar system, explaining its cosmology and calendars, all before delving into material first presented in the *Character Primer*. The changes to the races are primarily cultural, so while Dwarves are unchanged, Elves are divided between the Northern Winter Elves or Nyss, and the Southern Iosan. Both are reclusive races, but for different reasons. The Iosan are similar to standard Elves, favoring arcane and warrior castes while the Nyss favor the religious and warrior castes. Instead of the traditional Halflings and Half-Orcs, the Iron Kingdoms are home to Gobbers, Bogrin, Trolkin, and Ogrun. Gobbers and Bogrin are Goblin subspecies, the Gobber being small,

dexterous, and known for alchemical skills and natural self-camouflage, while the larger Bogrin are hardier, rougher, and less civilized. Ogrun are very strong and tough, excellent metal workers, and friends to the Dwarves. Trolkin are hardier still, able to attach or regrow lost limbs, they make fine fighters though a few become respected sorcerers.

All these races are effectively described, but unlike many settings, humans do not lose out. In creating a human character, a player can select a package to reflect the cultural traits of one of the 12 ethnicities found across Western Immoren. Each suggests popular starting feats, attribute adjustments, skill bonuses, and automatic class skills, plus a social flaw, height and weight range, and languages. This social flaw, which not every ethnicity possesses, is either Jingoistic or Socially Isolated. While optional, these cultural packages are an effective method of enforcing the cultural differences and rivalries that beset the setting.

While core classes like the Barbarian, Fighter, and Rogue remain unchanged, the others are all modified. In social terms, the Sorcerer and the Wizard are highly mistrusted, with Sorcerers often persecuted as witches. Bards suffer similarly, and legitimize themselves by joining military units as War Bards. Rangers are not affiliated to Druids or have access to spells, and are used as scouts. Druids, reflecting the more chaotic aspects of Nature, are rarely seen or understood.

Clerics and Paladins are the most changed to fit the setting. Divine spellcasting is tied to a cleric's faith rather than in the direct communion with his deity. To reflect this, Clerics receive the Faithcasting bonus feat at first level. Raising the dead is near impossible, and the use of healing spells is difficult and prone to painful -- even deadly -- side effects if done too often or if the individual being healed is of the wrong alignment or faith. Some clerical Domains have been added and others altered, while some Clerics are granted a third Domain for following a particular Patron. Not every religion has these, but Patrons are similar to saints, being once devout mortals who ascended to serve as divine intermediaries. Even a non-Cleric gains a small benefit if he adopts a Patron, and there are evil Patrons as well as good ones. The gods and faiths of Western Immoren are described in some detail, explaining the religious rivalries that also beset the Iron kingdoms.

The *Character Guide's* four new classes are the Arcane Mechanik, who bridges the gap between arcane magic and the building of machines; the Bodger, who can fix and rebuild mechanika, the setting's heavy robotic workforce and military shock units, the steamjacks and warjacks; Fell Callers, which are Trolkin able to deliver devastating shouts; and the Gun Mage, who channels spells through his pistols, though he is distrusted like all arcane spell users. New Prestige Classes include: the Battle Chaplin, frontline warriors for the god Morrow; Blackclads, who revel in the primordial wilderness; Mage Hunters, Elven warriors tasked to curb the excesses of human wizardry; the self-explanatory Pistoleer and Rifleman; the Second Story Man, a specialist burglar; and the Warcaster, who controls warjacks on the battlefield. A pleasing touch is the description of notable figures all of these classes.

New skills and feats take account of the Iron Kingdoms' higher technological level, including Craft (Clockwork) and Craft (Small Arms), and Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Small Arms), Mechanikal Aptitude, and Steam Monkey. The Faith Feats beyond Faithcasting are deity specific, while the new Society Feats represent membership in various organizations like the Fraternal Order of Wizardry or the Steam & Iron Workers Union. All have prerequisites, and give the benefits of social acceptance, support, and reduced costs for spell and mechanical materials.

The two most obvious technological advances in the Iron Kingdoms are firearms and mechanika. Firearms are breechloaders, firing individually cast rounds with alchemical blasting powder as the propellant. Cutting edge weapons include pepperbox pistols and two-shot single barreled rifles, but pinlock muskets and shield-mounted firearms also exist. Advanced non-combat gear includes field glasses, flintstrickers, and even pocket watches.

The Iron kingdoms differentiate between the mechanical -- devices that operate according to standard physical laws -- and the mechanikal, which operates through a combination of science and magic. The most obvious example of the mechanikal is the steamjack, a coal fueled, steam driven robot controlled via the magically contracted Cortex, which accepts and interprets the orders of its registered user. The laborjack is a simple model, while the military grade warjack can understand a variety of orders given by its Warcaster controller. Warjack weaponry includes heavy versions of ordinary melee weapons and firearms, but the Arcane Condenser and Accumulator components can store and transfer arcane energy to Rune Plates to enhance weapons with magical bonuses to make them +2, flaming, or

shocking burst. The ***Character Guide*** provides a decent primer to the setting's major selling point, the steamjacks, with several sample models and details of the heavy metal armor designed for Warcasters.

While alchemy has a more scientific basis, the creation of magical items is more difficult and expensive. This is both in monetary and Experience Point terms, reflecting higher priced materials. Further, the creation process is potentially physically taxing, with the chance of permanent hit point loss. Mechanical construction is cheaper, involves less arcane energy, and is less dangerous. This enforces the emphasis on Mechanika in the game, but also enhances the status of magical items when found, as they are invariably unique, possess a history, and are dangerous.

The ***Character Guide*** is rounded out with several appendices that neatly and usefully summarize various subjects covered earlier, plus a good index and tables list. They include a list of the personalities mentioned, plus class skills, priest ranks, and even more notes on building mechanika.

There is a lot to take in within the pages of the ***Character Guide***, but it is presented in what is an enjoyable and easy read. There is a lot of background material alongside the game mechanics, all of it specific to playing characters in the Iron Kingdoms, whether magic, religion, or combat. Some will want more on constructing mechanika, others will lament the omission of classes from the ***Monsternomicon***, but neither is a great loss. Otherwise, the ***Iron Kingdoms Character Guide*** is everything the player and the GM needs to create and support a character in the Iron Kingdoms. If only we could have had it sooner.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Reviews

Ticket to Ride and Ticket to Ride Europe

Published by [Days of Wonder](#)

Designed by Alan R. Moon

Illustrated by Julien Delval

Graphic design by Cyrille Daujean

Ticket to Ride: map board, 240 plastic Train Cars in five colors, 144 cards (including Train Car and Destination Ticket cards), five wooden Scoring Markers, & a rule booklet, full color, boxed; \$39.95

Ticket to Ride Europe: map board, 240 plastic Train Cars in five colors, 15 colored Train Stations, 158 cards (including Train Car and Destination Ticket cards), five wooden Scoring Markers, & a rule booklet, full color, boxed; \$39.95

Train games continue unabated in popularity, and no matter how many come out there's always another little twist to add to the mechanics. Consider Days of Wonder, and its game ***Ticket to Ride*** and the sequel ***Ticket to Ride Europe***.

In the vein of Phileas Fogg, players have wagered who can visit the most American cities in one week. The object is to score the most points by connecting select cities.

The board shows a map of America and part of Canada, with cities connected by rail lines. These stretch one to six spaces long, in several colors (although the color of the rail lines have nothing to do with the colors the players choose to play). Everyone gets a random selection of Destination Tickets, each showing two cities to connect; a hand of Train Car cards; and 45 Train Cars in your color.

The Train Car card colors match those of the rail lines. To claim a stretch of track, you must play a hand that matches the color and number. El Paso and Oklahoma City, for example, have a five-space yellow line between them; you have to collect and play five yellow cards (and, if you like, some combination of wild cards). You would then take five of your train tokens and place them in those spaces to show you traveled that line (you don't actually move anything about on the board -- that part is abstracted). The longer the segment of track claimed, the more points you get (a scoring track runs along the outside of the board).

There's a lot of strategy in drawing cards. You can choose a couple from five face-up cards or draw blind from the deck. You won't know what you'll get, but you could get wild cards. Choose a face-up wild card and you forfeit any second choice. Face-ups are replaced as they are drawn, and if wild cards dominate the selection, all face-up cards are discarded and replaced with new cards -- you may not get the second face-up card you were hoping for.

Destination Tickets are revealed at the end of the game. Cities further apart are worth more points when they're linked. If you don't complete a card's route, the point value is subtracted from your total. Whoever has the longest track gets a 10-point bonus, and the highest score wins.

Ticket to Ride Europe is just about the same game, but the few changes it offers turn out to be significant. Unsurprisingly, the map shows Europe and bits of Russia. The route lengths at the top end skip right to some bigger

numbers, and the Destination Tickets are split up. You now choose from one long journey and some small ones, so you make the decision whether to attempt a long ticket at the outset (in the original, all tickets are mixed together and any draw could yield one of several difficult routes). The biggest changes are ferries, tunnels, and stations. Ferries connect cities across water, but they *require* the use of one or more wild cards. If you get shut out of a city you need to finish a route, building a station at the contested town lets you trace a line using someone else's rails (though unused stations are worth extra points at game's end). When you build on a tunnel, you must draw three cards from the deck, and if those match the color of the line you're building it costs extra cards to finish the route.

Both games have similar components, and those new to Europe are reflected in the first game's selection (the Train Stations are the same decent plastic casting job as the Train Car tokens). They enjoy the high quality standards set by the European market, with mounted boards, bright artwork (the covers of both have clever thematic similarities), and lasting pieces. The one real improvement: Europe has larger playing cards, suitable for the shuffling necessary in larger games.

These strategic complications, though few, make ***Ticket to Ride Europe*** a different game. Both are fine entries into the crowded train genre -- they're simple, a lot of fun, straightforward, and easy enough for smaller children to find playable and educational. Once you've played the sequel, however, you're not likely to look back. It's too easy to get a decent, consistent score in the original game by going for longer train routes. These are pared down in Europe, leaving only one truly massive point-scorer on the board. Uncertainty about whether you can carve a route through a mountain and the chance to rescue your score by playing a station where it's needed . . . these things take it from a game with many calculated but ultimately predictable decisions to a multi-layered journey requiring you to juggle several workable options.

Perhaps there's a line of demarcation where the first set appeals best to the younger generation and the second lets them graduate to a new level of play, but while ***Ticket to Ride*** was a fine piece of work, Days of Wonder may have made their own prototype obsolete with a well-balanced cousin that makes the trip slightly less straightforward. ***Ticket to Ride Europe*** just ends up being the hot ticket in town.

--Andy Vetromile

Playing the Other Side of the Magic Mirror

Like most GMs (I suspect), I have had a myriad of game ideas that I've never gotten a chance to use. This past week, I was reminded of one of them by hearing about -- of all things -- a Broadway musical.

The musical in question is *Wicked*. It tells the story of the relationship between Glenda the Good Witch and Elphaba the Wicked Witch of the West before the events of *Wizard of Oz*. Although it's a great, evocative title, it -- coupled with the subject matter -- lends itself too easily to Abbot & Costello-esque abuses:

"Did you see that *Wicked* musical?" "The . . . which one?" "Yeah, that one."

One review likened *Wicked* to the *Rosencrantz and Gildenstern Are Dead* of *Wizard of Oz*. And, while I've never considered myself to be a die-hard Oz fan, I'd take a bullet for *Rosencrantz and Gildenstern Are Dead* (and the similarly scripted *Shakespeare in Love*).

Sadly, I haven't actually *seen* said musical, nor do I have any immediate plans to. If I were to ask my frugal wife if it's okay for us to drop more than \$100 apiece on theatre tickets despite the fact we both currently don't have permanent jobs, I suspect she'd be fully justified in sending her flying monkeys after me.

However, it sounds neat, and the audio clips on the [website](#) sound interesting enough (especially "Popular"), so for now I'm going to assume it's as brilliant a piece as my noggin pretends.

Anyway, the as-yet unused game idea this musical premise reminded me of is that of an interlocking adventure -- two related adventures that show two sides of the same conflict or story. In the same way that *Rosencrantz and Gildenstern Are Dead* and *Hamlet* show two sides of the same story, I think it would be a blast to do something similar in an RPG.

Although there are a few literary examples already mentioned, the idea seems to be most common in computer games. The most "pure" example I can remember of this premise is *Nethergate*, an RPG by small publisher [Spiderweb Software](#) that tells a tale of Celt/Roman conflict (complete with mercurial fae). In one half, you play through as a ragtag band of Celtic warriors, fighting against the evil Romans. In the other half, you play as a band of Romans, fighting against upstart Celtic rebels. The two adventures take place at the same time, so one chapter might have the Celts acquiring an item of power from a cave for a village, while the same chapter of the Roman adventure might require the PCs to storm the village in an attempt to steal the same item. Likewise another chapter might have the Celts trying to befriend the fae of an abandoned castle, while the counterpart in the Roman story has the protagonists storming that castle, trying to kill the "evil" fae.

Another example is *Half Life: Opposing Forces*. This game takes place at the same time as the original *Half Life*, only with the main character playing the role of one of the special force agents who was sent after the original's protagonist Gordon Freeman.

This doesn't count the other times this technique has been used tangentially, such as the opening level of the original *Star Wars: Dark Forces*, where the main character has acquired the plans to a super-secret weapon that he must smuggle to a rebel princess. Or the various real-time strategies of Blizzard, where playing the forces of various opposing factions is the norm.

Within the RPG world, this technique is rarer; I can't think of a single example of a commercial interlocking adventure. (Of course, there aren't many commercially published adventures anymore, either.) The closest I can remember is *Reverse Dungeon*, an old *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Second Edition* adventure that puts the heroes in the role of the monsters, fighting to keep adventurers from taking their stuff. (If there *are* any such adventures, I'm sure I'll hear about it from [our loyal readers](#). And if I was a betting man, I'd bet that at least one such example adventure is for *Call of Cthulhu*.)

If we widen our definition a bit, there are a number of examples of interlocking settings, mostly by allowing players to

portray various sides of a conflict. The *World of Darkness* is all about the interactions of various factions, with the old incarnation's *Hunter: The Reckoning* being the most obvious example, since that book's protagonists are expected to fight all the protagonists of the other books. *Exalted* likewise weaves a complex tapestry of opposed forces, all of whom are suitable for playing as characters.

But actual concurrent stories set within the same overall plot are a fair bit rarer in the game world. The reasons behind this are fairly obvious. Probably the biggest problem is the question about what to do about the problem of the two forces interacting. The easiest is to say that they don't; they may hear *about* the actions of their counterparts, but they won't be able to directly interact. While simple, it's also the least satisfying

Allowing for extended interaction is probably the most complicated, since -- as best as I can tell -- there are only two possibilities. The first is to play through the same scene twice from both points of view, requiring players (and the GM) to remember what their counterparts did previously, *and* forcing the players to play a scene with characters they haven't used before. And, of course, there's the implicit understanding that both sides need to "behave"; if the first adventure has a scene midway through with Team A and Team B meeting, and Team A goes on from that scene to finish their adventure, then it would be quite a challenge if, in the second adventure, Team B were to go berserk and attack Team A.

The second -- and probably simpler -- possibility here is to allow players to play "forgotten" scenes; just because the previous adventure didn't have Team A going into a bar and meeting Team B, this doesn't mean that Team A *couldn't* have gone into a bar and met them. Of course, this has the same problem of Team B being "forced" not to do anything to Team B that would have made an impact on Team A's original adventure.

Possibly the easiest option is to allow limited interactions "from afar." In this case, the GM plots for certain strict possibilities of interaction; this allows for GM interference if things don't go according to plan. As an example, let's take an interlocking adventure involving a group of pirates and a pre-*League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*-esque group of Renaissance secret service agents acting on behalf of Her Majesty. In the first half of the adventure, the secret-service PCs are atop a cliff and see the band of pirates below. As they are debating what to do, a fight breaks out atop the cliff with another band of pirates. While the agents fight with the pirates, one of the agents sees the other group below fire a cannon up at the cliff, causing an avalanche that sends the heroes tumbling into a cave (and separating the two groups again). In the second half of the adventure, that same scene has the PCs notice a scuffle on the cliff above; they can either react by firing a cannon, or else an NPC might fill the cannon-firing void if the players hesitate (or try to interfere). As the pirate PCs notice the other group fall into a cave, they find themselves faced with the possibility of fighting the very same pirates who were fighting the first group . . . who, having survived the cannon blast, are looking for answers.

Of course, by its very nature an adventure of this sort requires more railroading than more open-ended adventures. However, the possibilities for crafting an interesting and memorable tale are that much greater.

If nothing else, it might give players a chance to be wicked.

--Steven Marsh

The Triple City of Amadan

by Matt Riggsby

Amadan is, in one sense, a single city. Its inhabitants share a common culture and language, are ruled by a single government, and can stroll around town, seeing everything worth seeing over the course of an hour or two. In another sense, it is three cities, three different settlements separated by thousands of miles. What makes this possible is a set of three magical portals linking each to the other as though different continents were only a short walk away from one another.

Geography and Land Use

Amadan consists of three settlements: Cold Amadan, Amadan by the Sea, and Hot Amadan.

Cold Amadan is not just north of the other two parts of the city, but quite a way north in absolute terms. Summers are short, and winters long, cold, and dark. Cold Amadan sits in the middle of a broad plain between tundra and grassland. The land is poorly watered and the growing season is short, so agriculture is difficult, but it is home to herds of large grazing herbivores and the predators who hunt them, all of whom have thick, attractive pelts. There are also considerable forests a few days journey to the south, providing access to a considerable quantity of wood, and small but rich deposits of copper and other ores.

Amadan by the Sea is well south of Cold Amadan, in the warmer reaches of a temperate zone, and well to the west (about a ten hour time difference). It sits on a small, steep-sided island at the extreme eastern end of an archipelago whose islands grow larger as they approach a nearby continent. Like the other islands nearby, it could support a population of fishermen and a little gardening and grazing (the sandy soil and lack of water sources would preclude any other kind of agriculture), but as it stands, the island is almost entirely built up. In fact, there have even been some efforts to artificially increase its size with pilings, rocks, and sand filling in some shallow spots by the shore. Some nearby islands serve as suburbs, with large comfortable villas for wealthy residents who want to get away and clusters of smaller homes for poorer people who can't afford to live on the main island.

Hot Amadan is just a bit east of Cold Amadan (about an hour's time difference), but far to the south, in the tropics just below the equator. The weather ranges from hot and mildly humid to very hot and oppressively humid. The city's immediate surroundings are largely farmland, but its surroundings are a lush rain forest, dotted with clearings around outlying villages. There is also a large river a few miles away.

The city's population is about 70,000; on average, each settlement has about a third of that total. However, there are seasonal shifts, with fewer in Cold Amadan during that settlement's winter and more in its summer. No segment of Amadan is particularly large as cities go, but because of allowances for the shifting population, they are relatively spacious, with relatively broad streets and large plazas in both Cold and Hot Amadan. Amadan by the Sea, of course, has relatively narrow streets and small public places, given the limited room.

History

Amadan was never intended to be a city. About 1,200 years ago, three sorcerous sisters attempted a magical experiment to link their widely separated strongholds. Their goal was to create permanent magical portals through which they could travel and communicate easily. They succeeded, in a narrow sense. They were able to establish their portals, but an unexpected and immensely powerful backlash destroyed them.

Natives of the three regions, sensibly enough, avoided the sites for many years, but eventually the memory faded and people began filtering back. Legend has it that nomads near what would eventually become Cold Amadan were the first to happen upon their portal. Looking through one side, they saw a sandy slope leading down to the sea, lit only by

the stars when it was mid-day on their side. Through the other, they felt a breeze hotter than their warmest summer melting the snow on their side. Some brave soul ventured through and found himself half a world away, then turned around and, with a single step back through an identical portal, was home again.

Whoever went through first, nomads from the north soon met tribal villagers from the south, and soon thereafter they met fishermen working their way up the archipelago. Cautiously at first, but eventually enthusiastically, they began trading with one another: furs and wood (some of which turned out to be outstanding for boat building) from the north, fish and metal goods (traded up the island chain) from the slightly higher-tech islanders, and a variety of exotic woods, plants, and other goods from the south. Small settlements of traders, craftsmen, and amenities for travelers soon sprang up around the three portals, and they began to take on an unusual hybrid ethnic character as the racially and culturally disparate natives of the three areas developed a common language and began to intermarry.

Though the portals became important local centers, each was quite remote from any center of population, so they grew slowly. The island was probably closest to civilization, but the nearest nation, a kingdom with theoretical dominion over the island chain, was collapsing under internal warfare and a general economic depression. The first significant threat to the growing settlement was a group of pirates who, without the dying kingdom's navy holding them off, were raiding their way down the coast and up the island chain. Had Amadan by the Sea been simply an island town, it certainly would have fallen to the raiders. However, it was impossible to blockade because it could be easily supplied from the other segments of the city, and raiders who attempted landings were deeply surprised that the meek fishermen they had expected to find were reinforced by fierce jungle bowmen and enormous axe-wielding warriors from the far north.

Still, Amadan by the Sea was, at the time, the settlement's only real port and closest link to civilization (several days sailing in good weather, as opposed to weeks of arduous overland travel to the empires closest to the other parts of the city), so some stronger defense was in order. A number of pirates were contracted to serve as a sort of mercenary navy to defend Amadan by the Sea, and the arrangement worked well enough that a decade later, when raiding by neighboring tribes in the area of Hot Amadan became an issue, several of those were retained as mercenaries as well.

In the century that followed, Amadan's reach grew slowly but steadily. Around Hot Amadan, the city's merchants began to build a network of trading stations defended by its mercenaries; those settlements formed the nuclei of a network of small towns concentrating trade and agricultural production under Amadan's economic hegemony and, effectively, political control. With a fleet and no one to stand in their way, the Amadanese established more direct control over their archipelago and nearby coastal areas of the adjoining continent.

At its height, after three centuries of expansion, Amadan had direct control over perhaps a million people, about a tenth of whom were actual residents of the city, and influence over as many more in allied and dependent territories. The only area in which Amadan's control was not strongly felt was around Cold Amadan, and that largely because the population was simply too sparse in the cold wastelands for anybody to be firmly in control.

And then the plague hit. A terrible ailment swept through the region around Hot Amadan; traditional accounts say that one in three people died, and as many others fled. The plague spread to the other segments of the city, killing many in Cold Amadan and Amadan by the Sea. However, the virulence of the plague was apparently vitiated by climate. Although as many people inside the other segments of the city died as in Hot Amadan, hardly one in ten in Amadan by the Sea's archipelago contracted the plague, and hardly any people in the small settlements established around Cold Amadan were effected. A small popular movement pushed for blocking the portals to seal plague-ridden Hot Amadan off from the rest of the city, but in a defining historical moment, the city's ruling council refused to shut out their afflicted brethren, electing instead to send through as much aid as they could gather.

Several more waves of plague passed through the city in succeeding years (on average, once a decade for the next century), although none were quite as deadly as the first. Nevertheless, it was a serious blow to Amadan's power. The population of its breadbasket region was severely depleted and its shipping suffered. The region of Cold Amadan, though relatively healthy, grew as it became a refuge for those fleeing the plague, but living was difficult there.

Moreover, trade networks frayed and the power vacuum left by Amadan's temporary decline was quickly filled. Hot Amadan's neighbors had become more sophisticated over the years (the Amadanese believe that, ironically, this was

the direct result of their influence), and various alliances took control of the remnants of the towns and trade networks isolated from their mother city. The kingdoms near Amadan by the Sea were also starting to revive around this time, putting a damper on Amadan reclaiming its coastal territories. And even Cold Amadan began to suffer. Long regarded as an unpleasant but safe region, a series of particularly cold winters began, accompanied by the appearance of huge, shaggy wolves prowling the tundra and snow wyrms raiding outlying settlements.

Nevertheless, Amadan has managed to establish some sort of stability. The plagues have passed for now, so the population has had a chance to return to something like its previous levels. The regions around Hot Amadan and Amadan by the Sea are now occupied by potential rivals rather than easily subjected villagers and tribesmen, but they make better trading partners, and despite their ferocity the predators around Cold Amadan yield very valuable pelts. Moreover, a number of kingdoms and empires at a moderate distance from Amadan are experiencing periods of growth. In the far south, an ancient empire a few month's journey east of Hot Amadan has resolved certain internal problems which have plagued it for the past century or so, and trade in that direction is increasing. In the north, a number of northern tribes have become part of increasingly sophisticated trade networks and are visiting Cold Amadan more often to purchase goods for sale to growing kingdoms farther south.

At the moment, Amadan is both reasonably secure and prosperous. The question, then, is how long it will last. The city lacks powerful allies, and its trade ties are still a bit shaky. More unrest in any of its markets could still cause severe economic problems, and despite the city's defensibility in the short term, war with the southern tribes or the kingdoms near Amadan by the Sea could be more costly than the city could afford. But until that becomes a threat, there's money to be made.

Society

The people of Amadan are divided into three social classes: citizens, residents, and pirates. Citizens are members of a number of families in residence since the formal founding of the city, an event somewhat lost in the mists of time. Any child of two citizens is a citizen himself.

Citizens are divided into three "clades": the Djatami, the Tevik, and the Leoti. Each clade is loosely identified with the original residents of each segment of the city (the Djatami with Hot Amadan, the Tevik with Cold Amadan, and the Leoti with Amadan by the Sea), although intermarriage has long since made the ethnic associations nearly meaningless. For the Tevik and the Leoti, clade membership is transmitted through the male line; that is, if your father is a Tevik, you're a Tevik too. However, because the tribes around Hot Amadan were largely matrilineal, Djatami membership is passed down through the female line. Consequently, someone with, say, a Leoti father and a Djatami mother will be both Leoti and Djatami. However, someone with a Djatami father and a Leoti mother is born into *no* clade. The compromise position the city's founders arrived at is that children who are born into no clade are rotated through them annually; their children inherit clades as appropriate to their parents' status at the moment of birth.

The clades are groups of broad civic importance. They sponsor charitable efforts, form teams for various competitions, arrange celebrations and other ritual events, and so on. They also serve as electoral districts.

About a third of the people living in Amadan are citizens. Most of the remainder are residents, people without the political representation or ritual obligations, but who are permitted to live within city walls or on Amadan by the Sea at the cost of a few additional taxes. Legitimate children of one citizen parent and one resident parent are granted resident status but are not charged the usual resident fees.

Amadan's first line of law enforcement and the core of its armed forces are its third class, the pirates, comprising about 10 percent of the total population. The relationship between Amadan and the pirate mercenaries of its early days was formalized in a long-term arrangement. The pirates were granted the right to settle in Amadan free of any taxation in return for providing military service. The term "pirate" simply stuck. Pirates are organized into households; each household has a hereditary charter obligating all able-bodied adults to service in return for privileges. Someone who doesn't want to be a pirate can simply choose to live elsewhere. Because of high mortality during wartime, entire households can vanish, so the city commissions new charters from time to time. Despite the danger, a charter is a desirable honor; during peacetime, a pirate can become quite wealthy, since they can import goods free of duties.

The Toll

The magic powering the portals is not without its problems. On rare occasions, perhaps one or twice a year, someone going through a portal will come out the other side changed. This change is called the Toll, the small price that must be paid in order to make use of the portals.

The change is usually a small physical alteration: skin or eyes (either the iris or the entire eye) change to an unusual color, hands acquire extra fingers, hair starts to writhe and twist slowly like a stand of undersea plants, the body is covered with a zebra-like pelt, and so on. In more extreme cases, the change might involve a noticeable shift in abilities. For example, one person acquired a set of wings which allowed her to fly, while another acquired the ability to see in absolute darkness, but his vision dimmed in increasing light, making him essentially blind in full daylight. Occasionally, the changes are mental instead. Someone might come through the portal having forgotten one set of skills but learned another or speaking a different native language. In any event, all recorded changes have so far been unique.

The traits imposed by the Toll are hereditary, although not necessarily dominant. Consequently, many families have at least a few members with unusual features, and some are distinguished by the Toll imposed on them. Even the mental alterations are passed on in some way. For example, one family descended from a former cobbler seems to have an innate grasp of woodworking but are utterly hopeless at work with shoes, mirroring their ancestor's loss of his cobbling skills and commensurate understanding of barrel-making. The unusual appearance of many Amadanese can confuse visitors, but while people from Amadan may seem to represent countless different races, they are entirely human.

Politics

Amadan is a republic with rather complex electoral politics. Each part of the city has a number of "plaza lords" (21 in Hot Amadan, 12 in Amadan by the Sea, 18 in Cold Amadan) selected by lot annually from senior members (above the age of 45) of a corresponding clade (from Djatami for Hot Amadan and so on). The title derives from their nominal responsibility over the various plazas at the centers of the city's neighborhoods. Changes in the city have erased half of the plazas (and new ones have sprung up in their place without change to the political structure), but the administrative districts they represent remain. Plaza lords retain the authority to approve public works in their district, inspect goods sold there, supervise tax collection, officially record births, deaths, and marriages, and other small duties. They are compensated by being allowed to retain a portion of the taxes they collect, which is mostly spent in support of their duties. Because of vagaries of clade membership, it's entirely possible, if quite unlikely, for someone to be selected as lord of two different plazas.

The plaza lords elect five members from their clades to serve on the ruling High Council for the year. The High Council serves as a legislature, executive branch, and final court of appeal. They appoint judges to hear cases beyond the competence of the plaza lords, handle foreign affairs, and so on.

Theoretically, this arrangement provides equitable government for all families and classes of citizens. In practice, there are occasional instances of election fraud, in the form of rigging the lot drawing for plaza lords. More often, less politically active citizens are persuaded to decline office, requiring a new lot to be drawn and giving more prominent citizens more chances. The result is usually a government which is often conflicted enough to achieve relatively little (save in wartime) but has many of the same faces, or at least family names, appearing year after year.

Law Enforcement and Armed Forces

As already mentioned, the city's pirate class constitutes the core of the city's armed might. In peacetime, they serve as a constabulary and as marines on shipboard. During wartime, they function as elite troops and an officer corps, leading units made up of citizens and residents called up as a militia. The pirates are officially only junior and mid-level officers and operate under the orders of citizen generals, but most of those generals have the good sense to follow the

military advice of their technical underlings.

Amadanese are generally excellent sailors, and on land field reasonable heavy infantry with good archers. However, their native cavalry is limited to individual scouts; there's no room for horses in Amadan by the Sea, and they don't long survive tropical diseases in Hot Amadan. Nevertheless, the city is wealthy enough to hire mercenary reinforcements of whatever kinds become necessary.

Amadan's chief military advantage, though, is that since its foundation it has been practically impossible to blockade or besiege. As the pirates who first attempted to raid the city quickly discover, any one segment of the city can be reinforced and resupplied by the other two. Barring overwhelming force, Amadan can defend itself until its considerable monetary resources run out.

Economy

Amadan's economy relies heavily on trade, and is in a particularly advantageous position to do so. Unlike many other trading cities, it does not insist on its merchants having a near-monopoly on trade within the city. However, it charges stiff tariffs on shipments of goods through the city not undertaken by a citizen. Foreigners must pay duties amounting to, depending on the specific goods in question, between seven and ten percent of the value of goods shipped. Citizens pay only a fraction of that, and pirates none at all.

The city and its merchants have historically made most of their money moving raw materials: woods, furs, and so on. It is particularly well known as a source for rare materials used by alchemists and enchanter. In more recent years, though, as the neighbors of Amadan's more southerly parts have grown more sophisticated, more and more manufactured goods have been finding their way through the city.

Amadan is known for relatively few high-quality products of its own. For example, it produces good painted pottery (Cold Amadan is near some good clay deposits) and a variety of wines based on mixtures of fruits native to the Hot Amadan region, but neither has caught on elsewhere. However, it is notable as a producer of perfumes and incense. Amadanese perfumers combine tropical flowers and aromatic woods with near-Arctic musks in ways not possible for most others.

Science, Learning, and Arts

With almost unlimited access to the night sky (Hot Amadan's evening overlaps Amadan by the Sea's morning, and Cold Amadan is dark well into the day during the winter) and a wide range of longitudes, Amadan is a center for astronomical observation. Amadan's wealthy have constructed sizable observatories containing large sundials, astrolabes, and other equipment for tracking the stars, and its scholars have worked out some remarkably sophisticated theories about timekeeping, navigation, and the movement of heavenly bodies.

Despite that, Amadan seems a bit underdeveloped when it comes to other sciences and technologies. Glassblowing isn't an advanced art (none of the three segments of the city have appropriate sands for glassmaking), so optics is a perhaps surprisingly undeveloped science. Likewise, there are few deposits of metal ores in any neighborhood, so local metalwork is of average quality but rarely better. But the people of Amadan rarely care, since they can generally trade for what they want.

Literacy is also not particularly widespread except among the upper classes, and the written word is largely restricted to account books and technical records of astronomical phenomena. The general opinion is that mere words are insufficient for art. However, what Amadan lacks in written works, it more than makes up for in theater and visual arts. Amadan has developed several distinctive theatrical forms, ranging from two-person plays, often of a popular sentimental or satirical nature and performed in taverns or homes, to productions with large casts, elaborate sets, and a complicated formalized structure of stock characters and other conventions.

And just because Amadan doesn't go for written works doesn't mean it doesn't have books. Picture-books, telling

stories by a series of wordless (or nearly so) pictures are immensely popular among the upper classes. They are frightfully expensive, but generally exquisite and easily sold to people who don't share a language.

Painting is likewise popular. Buildings are decorated inside and out with murals and elaborate geometrical patterns in a wide variety of colors. This does a great deal to spruce up otherwise relatively dull architecture (most buildings in Amadan are fairly boxy wood or mud brick without much decorative detail).

What to See and Do

As a center of trade, Amadan is used to visitors. It has a number of inns, hostels, and other facilities to accommodate travelers for as long as necessary. But, obviously, Amadan has its own distinctive civic features.

The most notable sights in Amadan are, of course, the portals. Each segment of Amadan is built around a portal, a metal ring with an inner diameter of twenty feet, set on its edge. Their material resembles a highly polished bronze deeply inscribed with mystic symbols. Practical experience suggests that the metal is much harder than bronze, if not harder than steel, although direct experimentation is forbidden. The rings are set into the ground for stability, so at ground level they provide a passage about ten feet across (making the opening over eighteen feet tall at its highest point). Each is at the center of a large plaza, allowing plenty of room for carts and draft animals to get around.

The largest structure in Hot Amadan, ignoring its wall, is the Gran'Labari Theatre. It is a semi-circular, open air theatre taking advantage of a depression in the middle of a low rise to provide a performance space with good acoustics and shelter from the sights and sounds of the city around it.

Hot Amadan is also home to a large public garden, containing distinctive plants predominantly from its own region, but also some from the environs of the other two segments of the city and a few from farther afield. It is a favorite spot for romantic assignations.

Amadan by the Sea's most notable structure is Ovolo's Lighthouse, a tall tower built on the island's highest spot. A fire is kindled nightly to make it visible in the dark, and it is clad in alternating bands of blue- and yellow-glazed brick to give it a distinctive appearance in the day. The top-most level is dominated by a platform for the nightly bonfire, but people with appropriate connections have been known to use windows on the upper floors for astronomical observations.

Cold Amadan is home to the Council Hall, the nominal seat of civic government. Large public meetings are generally held out of doors, but the Council Hall has large chambers for meetings of the plaza lords and the High Council, as well as separate rooms for trials, archives, cells for scribes and clerks, and the rest of the machinery of government.

Amadan celebrates a number of civic festivities. For example, the Consecration of the Portals is a solemn ceremony held in late summer during which officials anoint the portals with a variety of sacred substances (daubs of aromatic powers, sprinklings of blessed wine and oils, and the like). In the month following it, citizens will try to pass through the portals barefoot at least once in a tradition whose origins have become completely obscure.

A more interesting civic event is the Tmbeya, a race around the city held in late spring. Three people are chosen from each clade to compete. The course starts in Hot Amadan, goes around the city, through the portal to Amadan by the Sea, around its shores, back to the portal to Cold Amadan and to its gates, and then back again by the same route. To ensure that the racers go around all three parts of the city, they must collect colored ribbons at various points and tie them to long poles they carry with them, reaching the finish line with brilliantly colored banners. The ribbon-collecting checkpoints are set by tradition, but the route the runners use to reach them is up to them, which leads to considerable speculation and strategizing as each race approaches. Most of the city turns out to watch every year, and betting is intense.

Amadan in the Campaign

Amadan could be used as a minor player in any fantasy world or an occasional destination or stop along the way, but it's particularly well-suited to being the base of operations for a group of PCs. Its multiple locations put it close to a variety of locations suitable for adventures: squabbling kingdoms in a temperate zone for Amadan by the Sea, monster- and barbarian-filled tundra and forests near Cold Amadan, and exotic jungle for Hot Amadan.

At the very least, it's a good location for the starting point for a campaign. At the crossroads of the world, the GM can justify characters of just about any background: questing knights, adventurous faux-Vikings, pseudo-ninja on the run, magicians searching the world for new knowledge, all could justifiably show up in Amadan, and plausibly share a table at a tavern where an old man stumbles in with a treasure map . . .

An Amadan-centric campaign might have the PCs as merchants (and their hangers-on) venturing all over the world, a group of pirates carrying out special ops-style missions to eliminate potential threats, or simply monster-hunters out to gather pelts in the far north or keep trade routes through the jungles open. As described, the city itself is more or less at peace with itself, but with very minor tweaks it could easily become a hotbed of intrigue for politically inclined players.

Here are some other ideas for adventures set around Amadan:

The Hard Way: One of the proverbial jokes around Amadan is the idea of going between the different parts of the city "the hard way," going over land and sea rather than through the portals. Perhaps the PCs make a Phileas Fogg-style bet that they can do it, or perhaps the enchantment which powers the portals is starting to fade, and fixing it requires that special items or materials be brought to each without going through them.

Annus Horribilis: One of the things which makes Amadanese feel secure is the knowledge that, while things might go badly around one part of the city, they couldn't go badly around all three. Could they? It's unlikely, but possible, that Amadan could find itself attacked on three fronts. For example, a charismatic warlord near Hot Amadan could raise a wide range of local tribes against the semi-foreign Amadanese (the visible consequences of the Toll could easily be taken as the result of demonic influence) while an ambitious kingdom on the mainland makes a play to establish control over the archipelago and a particularly hard winter sends the wolves and snow wyrms after humans as well as animals. Amadan would, for the first time, find itself cut off from aid. What can the PCs do to save the city?

Weird Sisters: Legend has it that the backlash from creating the portals destroyed the sorceresses who created it. But what if it simply displaced them in time, to reappear centuries after they vanished? They were clearly quite powerful to have created the portals to begin with, and the remote locations they chose for their strongholds suggests that they don't like company. They're unlikely to react well to finding tens of thousands of people using their portals, and the PCs may be the ones who have to convince them to leave the city alone.

Crunchy or Soft?

by Heather Barnhorst

Your local retailer has been experiencing rough waters as of late. While there is little hard evidence to support various theories, industry pundits seem to be in agreement that FLGS closures are at their peak. Publishers are selling direct to you, PDF sales have gained traction, online retailers are perfecting methods to reach customers worldwide, big-box chain stores are cherry-picking our bestsellers. Online gaming, a form of gaming that most stores cannot capitalize on (you may argue that we should all get LAN game areas into our play space but evidence shows that when DSL and cable becomes available in areas, the demand for LAN play areas goes down and that only the very best LAN stores can compete), is converting many of our customers to stay-at-home players. In general, various segments of the entertainment industry are doing an efficient job of nibbling away at many of our would-be customers. Many of us agree that retailing in this industry is undergoing a radical sea change and that the bleakest prediction of the future is that what few FLGS are left will be the ones that live a hardscrabble life based on the scraps that online discounters won't find it worthwhile to fiddle with.

Me? I'm pretty sure that more venues and more methods of delivery will help create new customers. I'm not sure that I will be managing one of the stores left standing but I do aim to try. In the end, more customers will benefit publishers and the retailers who are left standing but I also have a theory about "critical mass" and game stores. Why is it, I've asked myself, that areas with an abundance of good game stores seem to support a large gaming community but that the number of game stores is disproportionately large when compared to other metro areas of similar population? It is a bit of a chicken and the egg theory. Which came first -- the gaming community or the good game stores? My answer has always been -- both. They feed on each other and create a synergy where we are all working together to bring an awareness of gaming as a form of entertainment to new people. In areas where one or two stores operate, they seem to struggle to make themselves noticed by potential customers. So here is my worry: There are enough other entertainment opportunities which can whittle away at our critical mass so that if only a few of us survive that there won't be enough of us left to reach out to people who could be our customers. We need more good retailers who are dedicated to growing the pie for everyone. That means that retailers have to be proactive in finding new customers and converting non-gamers into gamers.

But in the process, we are watching a culture clash firsthand, and the battleground is our FLGS.

I call it the battle of the "Crunchy" and the "Soft," named after the famous tacos del muerte peddled by the local taco house next door to our store. Crunchy and Soft customers. In my lexicon, you are either a Crunchy or a Soft and I bet that if you are reading this column right now that you are a Crunchy.

Crunchy customers are our hard core gamers -- the goth, the geeky, the weird, the quirky, the obsessed fans. They are the sometimes slightly socially maladjusted who have remained loyal to us over the decades. They (okay you) are the stuff of myths and urban legends. At your best, you are insanely creative, utterly loyal, and the best of friends. At your worst, well, quite frankly, you can stink with the odor of stale pizza, flat Dr. Pepper, and old laundry, and in one publicized case, you can be redolent of cat pee. You can scare away other customers by greeting them in Klingon . . . and expecting to be understood. You think that bridal registers for games is a reasonable action to take to prepare your new household for the rigors of marriage. You are the gamers that I grew up with and you are the customers who are my favorites. Just a hint here -- all customers are my best customers but not all of them are my favorites. The FLGS is the community center and the safe haven for the Crunchies.

The point is that the Crunchies make the store go round. Many stores survive solely on your business, often to their peril. They even glorify the Crunchy lifestyle as if it part of the gaming experience, but Crunchy gamers are a small group in a niche market that isn't quite big enough to feed us all. It isn't that we retailers don't love our Crunchies, it is that we need more than what you provide to survive. If we are to stay in business and serve your needs, then we have to go outside our comfort zones to find new customers who don't understand you.

So there are the stores who court the Soft customers. These are the mundanes who will never self-identify themselves as gamers. To them, being a gamer is being a part of a marginalized and frightening counter-culture. They are the ones who somehow find a FLGS because a friend of someone who plays *Settlers of Catan* told them about the store in a convoluted word of mouth process that defies unraveling. "I've lived around the corner for seven years and I didn't even know you were here," are the words that drive us retailers to walk quietly into the office, close the door, and bang our heads up against the wall. (Ha! Those strange noises emanating from the office are finally explained.)

From the other side of the looking glass, the Softs are the ones who seem strange to us.

Somehow here at Attactix, we've hooked into the "Mormon Network." Colorado boasts a large Mormon population. One of our full-timers is Mormon and now many of her fellow church members come to the store to satisfy their board game cravings. Unlike many fundamentalist Christian groups, some of them even roleplay. Every semester, we receive frantic visits from panicked students and their parents who have to create dioramas for school projects. Much of our job involves soothing mom who is experiencing sticker shock as the dollars add up at the register. Other schools start board game clubs; we spend a lot of time with the teacher advisors finding age-appropriate games that are fun to play yet educational, since there seems to have been a movement in this country that promoted the idea that educational games could not be fun or attractive. There are our Senior Softs -- the elderly ladies who "visit" friends and relatives as their pastime. Before every trip, they pick up several copies of their favorite card games because "My sister can't find *Five Crowns* where she lives so I leave her my copy and just pick up a new one when I get home."

I have a great group of Softs who shop at the store but who won't play here. They meet every Tuesday night at the local Borders and play in the Starbucks there. They draw upwards of 30 players. It isn't that we don't want them, they just don't want our game room. Aesthetically we cannot measure up to their expectations for their gaming environment, and most of them don't want to mingle with the Crunchies. They play at Borders, they see games they like, they recommend our store as a great place to buy board games to their members, and their members purchase from us. It works . . . until someone at Borders figures out that they can make money on this group by carrying a broader range of board games (and don't think that it isn't in the works). I'm not sure that customer loyalty can overcome the lure of convenience and cheaper games. In fact, I am pretty sure that it can't.

And so the culture clash takes place every day. The Softs look like they are wondering if they might have to go through decontamination after they leave the store and the Crunchies resent the mundanes for invading their space. They quite rightly fear that some of the Softs might be looking down on them. My belief is that no one should be made to feel out of place, especially when gamers have proven to be so accepting of differences in lifestyle, age, sexual orientation, and even disabilities. The irony here is that if you are different you will surely fit in at a game store.

Some people in the industry aver that it is impossible for retailers to appeal to both the Crunchies and the Softs; the Crunchies will scare away the Softs and that the hardcore gamers won't tolerate their domain being invaded by the Softs. The Crunchies will defect to dark dens of gaming iniquity that cater to their niche needs for social interaction and community feeling.

With the risk of alienation very present, what are retailers supposed to do when they need both the Crunchies and the Softs to survive? When everyone says that the attempt to serve both will end in chasing both sets of customers away? When we are told to choose? I like both the Crunchies and the Softs. I like interacting with families and moms and VPs of up-and-coming aviation software companies. I like meeting teachers of English in Japanese schools and IT professionals who have visited all seven continents before they were 30. I like talking with construction workers who have scheduled a layover at the airport because they heard about the store and have to see it while passing through Denver. I like hearing about the culinary student's adventures when he comes home on break. I like the executive who talks cutting edge philosophy (yes, there is such a thing) with me. You try to figure out who are the Crunchies and who are the Softs because I am betting that you'll guess wrong nearly every time.

I choose not to choose.

Last night was a typical Friday night at Attactix. It was about quarter to 10 and an ex-employee and always faithful customer walked through the door. He grinned like a Christmas elf gone on growth hormones. He and I had attended a trivia game at a local bar the Sunday before and the master of ceremonies had played songs between the questions. Our

ears had pricked up -- we swore we had heard a William Shatner song. We had and my friend found the CD -- *Has Been*. Now, before you scoff, let me assure you that some of the songs, all of which are collaborations with real musicians, are good despite the wrongheaded words uttered by my full-timer when she threatened to quit upon hearing the first track. Generally Friday night is a Crunchy night for us and the Softs had long abandoned us for bars and movie theaters. The ***Magic: The Gathering*** players were filtering out once the tournament had ended and the Games Workshop boys had nearly finished cleaning up the tables. The ***Flames of War*** guys had bought their miniatures and gone. "What harm could a little Shatner do?" I asked myself so I let the ex-employee pop in the CD and crank up the volume. As the strains of *Common People* reverberated across the room, I understood why I am so fond of our Crunchy Customers.

"It's *Common People*. This is an awesome album," said one ***Magic*** player.

"Kewl," answered an RPG straggler.

"I love Kirk!"

And so we all bopped to Shatner, even embracing Shatner embracing his Shatner nature when my last customer of the evening walked through the door.

"Are we having a party?"

I paused and then I answered, "Yes, we're having a party." Only the Crunchies would know and love an album put out by Captain James T. Kirk. Only they would get it and smile and speak along because they know the lyrics in their hearts.

And so I lied to you. Last night, I chose. At least for one night.

Pyramid Review

Castles & Crusades: The Fantasy Role Playing Game Players Handbook

Published by [Troll Lord Games](#)

Written by Davis Chenault & Mac Golden

Cover & Internal Illustrations by Peter "20 Dollar" Bradley

130-Page Black & White Hardback; \$19.99

Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 Edition has a problem. It is too complex. Too many classes. Too many rules exceptions. Too many feats. All right, so the simple things at the heart of *Dungeons & Dragons* are still cool -- the easy *d20 System* mechanic, the Armor Class reversal, and any number of nifty settings that we have seen in the last five years. But there are still too many feats and all too often the ones selected do not change for one type of character from one game to the next. Perhaps this is one reason why Wizards of the Coast is publishing *Dungeons & Dragons for Dummies*?

So what do you do if you want to bash a dungeon *Dungeons-&-Dragons*-style? Options include any previous version of the game from *Basic* to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, but then the first is *too* simple, *too* inflexible, while the second is *too* . . . Well, just *too*, okay? Step up *Castles & Crusades*, which offers up old-time gaming via an all-new simple game engine and back-to-basics philosophy. It first appeared in the *Castles & Crusades: A Guide & Rules System for Fantasy Role Playing Collector's Edition*. This was a white boxed set containing three little booklets, a set of plain polyhedral dice, and a crayon (!), all designed not just to nudge your nostalgia button, but to give it a good hard stamp. It has been superceded (mostly) by the *Castles & Crusades: The Fantasy Role Playing Game Players Handbook*, and if the *Collector's Edition* is the *Castles & Crusades* answer to the *Dungeons & Dragons White Box*, then this first book is its answer to the first edition of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. Even then, such an analogy only just gets you out of the starting gate.

Castles & Crusades can be best described as the OGL version of *Basic Dungeons & Dragons*. If that is the starting point, then its race has been up through both versions of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* to grab the bulk of its races, classes, and knickknacks, with a stop off at *Gamma World, Fourth Edition* for its Armor Class mechanics (where do you think *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* got them from?), and after a final layover at the *d20 System* for its mechanics, it ends with a charge back down the home straight for the return to *Basic*. So if this is *Basic Dungeons & Dragons* re-engineered, what is so different?

In *Basic Dungeons & Dragons* you rolled up one of the stereotypical characters as normal -- Cleric, Fighter, Thief, and Wizard, but all four classes were for humans only. You could choose to play a Dwarf, Elf, or Halfling, but they were classes in their own right, and limited in the number of experience levels a character could attain. In *Castles & Crusades*, a player is free to select both class and race. All of the races you would expect to be present are here -- Dwarf, Elf, Gnome, Half-Elf, Half-Orc, Halfling, and Human -- along with the classes Assassin, Barbarian, Bard, Cleric, Druid, Fighter, Illusionist, Knight, Monk, Paladin, Ranger, Rogue, and Wizard. Further, every class does exactly what you expect them to. One nice addition is the extra modifiers for class abilities available if a character of a particular race selects that class. For example, a Halfling Ranger gains +2 to Conceal and Move Silent, but if he were an Assassin or Rogue, he would gain the +2 to Hide and Move Silent.

Character generation remains unchanged -- roll 3d6 six times and assign to attributes, choose race and class, note abilities, buy gear, choose spells if necessary, and decide on alignment. It's very similar to *Dungeons & Dragons* except for its core mechanic, which is built directly from a character's attributes. During the creation process, a player

designates some of his character's attributes as Primary, and others Secondary. Human characters possess three Primary attributes, while all other races have just the two.

Either way, both Primary and Secondary attributes provide a base line Challenge Class against which all Attribute Checks are made. If a Primary attribute, this Challenge Class is just 12, but for a Secondary attribute it is 18. Attribute Checks are made for basic actions like lifting a gate (Strength) or haggling for the best price (Charisma); for many of a character's class abilities, such as a cleric's Turn Undead (Wisdom) or a rogue's Move Silent (Dexterity); and for saving throws, for example against Illusions (Intelligence) or Energy Drain (Constitution). To make an Attribute Check, the GM or Castle Keeper determines the appropriate attribute and thus the base Challenge Class, before modifying it according to the task's difficulty. The player rolls 1d20 and adds a bonus equal to his character's current level plus attribute modifier. Equal or beat the Challenge Class and the character succeeds.

There is just the one further development of this Siege Engine, the term for ***Castles & Crusades***' mechanics. Monsters and NPCs gain a modifier equal to the number of Hit Dice possessed. This modifier is used to resist the effects of a character's actions or spells, to add to attack rolls in combat, and conversely, to adjust a Challenge Class when a character must make an Attribute Check. Thus if trying to save against Dragon Breath, the basic modifier would be equal to the dragon's Hit Dice.

Everything else in ***Castles & Crusades*** works just as you would expect it to, most obviously magic and combat. How it all works is explained in just a few easily understood pages. As to how it plays, well this is ***Dungeons & Dragons***. And unless you happen to be one of the ***Vampire: the Masquerade*** generation, virtually everyone knows how to play this game.

The ***Castles & Crusades Players Handbook*** is not exactly problem-free, but such problems can be divided between those that are not really problems, and those that are. Those that are not start out and end with this being a ***Players Handbook***. It gives you everything you need to play bar the monsters and the treasure, and until the arrival of the ***Monsters & Treasures*** supplement, this might seem to be a problem. Of course, the ***Collector's Edition*** contains some of this information, but since it is out of print . . . Yet take almost any ***Dungeons & Dragons*** adventure, apply file and emery paper as necessary, and you are good to go. Indeed, ***Castles & Crusades*** is all but the perfect excuse to dust off all those ***Basic Dungeons & Dragons*** adventures.

The real problems are physical. The book is a nice hardback, the contents illustrated with pleasing artwork. But it lacks both index and character sheet. Worse still, the layout is duller than a party political broadcast, and another editorial pass would not have gone amiss.

There is a moment in reading through ***Castles & Crusades Players Handbook*** when you realize that the game's mechanics are so simple and so uncluttered that you have to slap yourself and wonder why nobody thought of this before. In fact the game feels stupidly simple, and not adversely so. It is a pity that the game has not been pitched at the inexperienced or new gamer rather than the long term gamer, because ***Castles & Crusades*** has more of a pick up and play quality than the current version of the ***Dungeons & Dragons***. Above all it is clear that this is a game in which fun is paramount, unlike the one-note joke of its nearest rival in the nostalgia market. This emphasis on fun is joined by an equal one on simplicity, which also explains its flexibility that will allow a Castle Keeper to run almost any ***Dungeons & Dragons*** adventure using these mechanics. This might only be an OGL RPG, but with nothing like ***Basic Dungeons & Dragons*** on the market, ***Castles & Crusades*** is the very best next thing.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

La Strada

Published by [Mayfair Games](#)

Designed by Martin Wallace

Illustrated by Tanja Donner

Multi-piece board, 124 Road tiles, 19 Settlement tiles, eight Workshop tiles, four Resource tokens, 48 wooden Merchant cubes, & rules; full-color boxed set; two to four players; \$36

In *La Strada*, you play merchants in northern Italy back when that meant something, trying to open outposts for your goods in all the towns you come across. To get your workers and your products there, you have to build your own roads to connect your burgeoning empire.

The object of the game is to secure the most gold from your shops.

The board comes in six sections; changing their placement makes a new map each game. Scattered about are 19 settlements, placed randomly and then flipped over. Players place their home base -- called their Workshop -- where they think it does them the most good. The playing pieces and board spaces are hexagonal, so your tiles overlay the spaces.

During a turn, a player has up to 10 resources to build their business. Each player gets a selection of roads in his color, and pays to build them. Tougher terrain costs more resources, so paving the hills costs more than cutting through plains. You must connect to a settlement all at once -- you can't leave a road unfinished and come back to it -- but you can hopscotch to new places from anywhere along the network you've established.

Once your road reaches a settlement, a merchant block shows you've set up a shop. Anyone else who attaches their road there can do the same, but that settlement's gold is shared by everyone, and more fingers in the pie means less to go around. If too many merchants flood that market, no one gets the gold (you can build into a settlement to kill everyone's score, if you're willing to divert your resources). For example, one player in a hamlet gets two gold; two merchants get one each; and three or four traders leave everyone empty-handed. Bigger settlements offer more gold and more room for merchants. If a player finds he cannot build anywhere on his turn, the game is over and the gold added up to determine the winner.

The two-player game is more straightforward. Players alternate playing two colors each and work from two workshops. Building is the same, but settlements are claimed by placing a single merchant; when all locations have their merchant, the game is over. Your merchants go in the highest-scoring box for that settlement type. For example, since a hamlet's best reward in a regular game is two gold, every hamlet a player claims scores two gold. Ties go to the player with the most unspent resources.

While the settlements are pretty and the terrain simple but pleasant, the illustrations are the game's biggest weakness. They and the colors aren't rigid and obvious, and sometimes the hues are altered. Yellow roads aren't hard to see, but the board's village illustration has a yellow courtyard while the matching settlement tiles have a green yard with a yellow path . . . they look like the yellow workshops. Subtle gradations between brown and black workshops usually demand you look at both colors just to make sure you're using the right starting point. The tiles aren't too small, but the pictures just don't jump out. Black merchant cubes are stark, but brown cubes look like they could use the black resource track -- and brown's resource track is a reddish hue that matches city settlements. Grey has bluish roads, and

an even lighter track that looks almost white.

The board segments are high-grade stuff as well, but they have a more fundamental problem -- they don't fit together. The pieces can be rotated, and that may help find just the right arrangement if you're willing to put in as much time building the puzzle-like board as setting up the rest of the game. If there are only a few arrangements that work right, it rather defeats the purpose of a variable board layout. Realistically, unless you hammer them flat, you're just going to live with a couple of sections sticking up. Offering everyone their own set of road pieces may seem like an expensive idea, and such things obviously contribute to the game's price tag. The game comes with one of those molded plastic bins that has a place for everything, so passing out everyone's tiles is a problem when putting the game away, not getting it out.

The strategies involved in ***La Strada*** are simple, and while it's engaging, interfering with another player's methods can be a bit tough (to say nothing of costly). It's easier near the end when roads are already blocking a lot of plays, but by then you may not be able to choose whose play you'll interrupt. It's a game with a nice equilibrium; there's not so much thinking that it can't be finished quickly, and there's always room for one more good game about vying for resources. But this must be leveled against the eyestrain and the proliferation of more inventive possibilities already available, including some from Mayfair Games itself.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



More Mundane Than Fan Now . . . Twisted and Evil

Back when I was working at my friendly local comic & game shop, one of our customers -- an elderly frail-looking gentleman with a quiet voice -- was a Superman completist. If it was a new comic book, and it had Superman in it, he would buy it. This resulted in him purchasing a great many comic books each week that he wouldn't had they been Supermanless.

After Superman died and came back, and the Powers That Be at DC recognized the scent of a gravy train pulling out of the station, Superman began appearing in lots and lots of comics. This resulted in my putting a large number of comics in his file each week, which I'd then need to explain when he came in to pick up his file.

"Uhh . . . these 40 issues are part of the *Final Night* crossover storyline; Superman appears in each issue this week."

"Umm . . . This is a cross-company comic, teaming up Superman with LCD Publishing's highly popular *Lady Thong* . . ."

"Err, yes . . . Superman makes a one-panel appearance on Captain Midtier's monitor in this comic, saying 'I'm busy in Metropolis; can you handle it?' . . ."

Except in the most extreme of extreme cases (a Superboy clone appears in a flashback in one panel of an Elseworlds noncanonical crossover about Brother Power the Geek), I think he purchased them all. As best I could tell, this wasn't an independently wealthy customer either. So I always felt bad, imagining him someday out on the street, penniless and huddled up beneath pages of *Lady Thong* to keep warm.

I fled the employment of the comic & game shop back in 1999, back when *Pokémon* was at its height and 80% of my day consisted of saying either "No, we don't have any packs in stock" or "No, we have no interest in buying your uncommon cards." As a result, I don't know if recent developments in the DC Universe -- ranging from the special year-long Really Boring story arc in *Superman* to the recent decision of one of DC's iconic half-dozen that, in the right circumstances, murder isn't all that bad -- have met with his approval and resulted in his buying many other comics. But, in the past week I've been thinking about this customer, and realizing: I don't have what it takes to be a die-hard fan of anything anymore.

It's only been in the past few days I've made this realization, so it's taking some time for this to sink in. It's especially surprising because I've long considered myself the quintessential fanboy of many, many things. But in the past year or two -- ever since I've been serious about settling down, especially after moving cross-country into a much smaller apartment -- I haven't kept up with almost anything I used to.

My near-complete collection of "everything *They Might Be Giants* has ever been a part of" hasn't been updated in two years or so.

I have stacks of monthly comics that I haven't read; it's been a month since I last read *any* comic.

I think my Weird Al and Peter Gabriel collections are still complete, but that's just because neither has come out with anything in the past two or three years (as far as I know).

I'm three DVD boxed sets behind on *Mystery Science Theater 3000* for pity's sake, a mere three years after I bought a copy of *Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Movie* for about \$60 and felt glad to do so.

My near-complete **GURPS** set wouldn't be anywhere near so if I wasn't a member of the Steve Jackson Games megacorp.

I just don't have what it takes anymore to be a fan.

I'm trying to peg exactly why this is, or when it happened. To be sure, a large part of this decline is financial; I think I'd rather try saving up for neat new toys like the live-action "house" set I've heard so much about. A fair bit of the

decision is because space; my current office in our apartment is a converted walk-in closet, and the size of this two-bedroom apartment is about the size of the old one-bedroom one I had in Tallahassee. A lot of it boils down to time; I haven't had the minutes to rub together to, say, sell any of the excess stuff I have (which would result in money *and* space), let alone to devote to some obsession or another.

But, really, I think a lot of the reason is because it seems that being a fan nowadays is exhausting. And I feel the biggest reason is because of the explosion of media, and especially the Internet.

I remember back to the early 1990s, when I was awaiting news on **GURPS Cyberpunk**. Back then, hard news on upcoming **GURPS** books was pretty much limited to *Roleplayer* magazine. The information was always brief, often sketchy, frequently wrong (I'm still waiting for those **GURPS Prisoner** adventurers), and -- perhaps most importantly - - infrequent. Since it was a bimonthly mag, the amount of time I could devote to **GURPS** fandom was, maybe, a few hours a month, and I could feel like I was "on top" of the scene.

Now, though, I could spend hours each day, roaming message fora (two official and whatever else is out there), perusing fan projects, chatting online, and generally devoting myself to all things **GURPS**-y. That doesn't leave a lot of hours in the day for *other* obsessions.

Of course, a lot of it is a matter of scale; there's nothing that says I *have* to read every message board or comb through each fan project. Even so, I get the sense that, in the old days, there was a limit to the amount that even a dedicated fan could get his hands on. I remember printing one of the only fan project **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** "netbooks" (as they would come to be known) back in 1991. Now I could print-spool a hundred pages a day of new fan projects for various games. Once upon a time, a *Star Wars* fan could say, "Of course I'm a real fan; I've read *Splinter of the Mind's Eye!*" Nowadays, any demonstration of a *Star Wars* completist's devotion would be accompanied by the rumble of a Mack truck.

Unfortunately, I suspect it's going to continue being difficult for many fans; the Internet has resulted in a near-constant stream of information on all topics, and publishers who want to emerge from the noise will need to pump up the volume -- with their own message boards, aggressive publication schedules, and continued innovation -- to be heard among the din.

I might revisit this issue in a future column; mostly, I just wanted to catalog this realization for now. And I leave, for now, wondering if my former Superman customer -- looking at a three-inch stack of new arrival comics -- ever felt the way I feel right now.

--Steven Marsh

Spellslinger

A Fantasy Western with Spell-Slinging Rail Guns for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

* * *

"The Orcs circled again, riding their fearsome wolves. Both wolf and rider howled as they charged. Blast! They know our stage has to follow the 'line or we can't use our best guns. 'Zeke fired another bolt at them and started enlarging another, while that Elf boy we hired for the trip started chanting some fool elaborate spell. We probably don't have another minute. Our Halfling guide was keeping us on track, so she's no use in this fight. Oh oh, the Orcs are raising their spears to throw them. I raised my Dancing axe and hurled it into their midst . . ."

As presented, this setting is a modestly mundane timeline with magic subtle enough that any effects on history are mostly canceled out. In "The West," wherever it may be, little is said of "civilization out East," other than as a crowded, decadent place. "The West" is seen as a place where individuals can make a difference. This is an age of discovery, of human, Dwarf, and Halfling settlers and explorers charting new territory. The indigenous Orc and Elven populations meet these efforts in a variety of ways. The newcomers to this land bring firearms, locomotives, and science, while the natives have a sense of the land, its spirits, and a connection to the foundations of magic.

A Quick Timeline (Dates relative to Present, see also pp. OW19-20)

*Unless otherwise noted, page references to Basic, Fantasy, Lite, and Magic are for **GURPS**, Fourth Edition. All other references are for **GURPS**, Third Edition.*

- "New World" continent discovered
300
- Trading and colonization in the New World starts. Many tribes' lands are "bought" and settlements start. Some
200 less ethical human leaders trick or wipe out small groups of Elves and Orcs.
- Elves put up organized resistance to human incursions. Their superior magic and knowledge of the area sabotage
150 human supply lines. Many Orc groups are wiped out, others retreat, reinforcing other tribes, bringing human ideas. The first steam engine arrives from across the ocean. Estimated population of the colonies: 50,000
- First Dwarven Mine/town starts in rough hills 50 miles from the largest human settlement.
125
- Small pockets of Independence start as third and fourth-generation humans see the new land as their homeland.
100 Some ally with native tribes to try and force out less "environmentally friendly" colonies. The first steam-boats sail rivers.
- 95** The first rail roads start hauling ore from a Dwarven town to a nearby port. Ancient ruins are discovered.
- 75** Dwarven settlements have internal rail systems installed when they can. 500 miles of rail line crisscross the East coast.
- 50** The first museum is founded in the New World. Ruins of a different ancient culture are found. A hoard of Orcs swarm toward the largest human settlement. There are mass casualties on all sides. Elves are mostly neutral, but a few help one side or the other. Following this, the dominant human government makes a Treaty to preserve the far West half of the continent, making it free from cities and settlements.
- 35** Mining disturbs the slumber of a pair of angry dragons. They ravage half the town before an agreement is reached. They will receive a royalty/tax of all profit made within 50 miles if they protect it. The dragons help rebuild the town and use magic to help find new ore deposits away from the main mine (see also Etiquette and Treaties, pp DR42, DR44)
- 25** The Treaty is broken by rogue settlers and then corporations and finally the government admits the treaty is void.

- 15 A group of "Dark" Elves is caught sabotaging supply lines to a deforestation operation. They all immolate themselves rather than be caught alive. (It is suspected some escaped -- it is difficult to count ashes . . .)
- 10 Orcish inter-tribal warfare endangers several towns. The towns are fortified in response, but warfare cuts off bulk supplies and travel.
- 5 A shipment of powerstones by rail is hijacked at night. The large crate of gold nuggets is the only thing taken.
- 1 An Orc horde is predicted to form soon. (Or so say oracles and sociologists . . .)

The Present brings . . .

Human towns contain classic "Western" buildings such as a assay office, bank, a blacksmith, a rail/spellagraph office, a saloon/hotel, a school, a sheriff's office/jail, and a manasmith/healer/chemist (see p. OW11). Most valuable buildings will be made of worked, magic-resistant stone (likely the jail, bank, alchemist's and assay office). The walls will likely be enchanted with spells like Magic Resistance, Spell Shield, Spell Wall, Pentagram, Drain Mana, Force Dome, Force Wall, Utter Dome, Utter Wall, depending on the size and value of items being protected (see pp. M123, M170). For added security, some buildings even have the equivalent of Divert Teleport, Teleport Shield, and Scrywall. With the presence of magic, towns will be less dirty than in history, perhaps as clean as portrayed in movies. Hospitals are rare -- most use the first aid skill and seek native/herbal treatments as well as magic. Traditionally, many barbers were trained in First Aid as well. Food/rations purchased at general store are generally less likely to be stolen than expensive Create Food items. (All costs presented hereafter are in TL5 dollars, as per pp. B27.)

A new idea that is gaining popularity with many groups is the large-scale reclamation of arid land. A corporation (or government) starts by creating multiple artificial springs, which fill water tables and create arable land. The new land is then allocated to dedicated farmers, cattle ranchers, and urban sprawl. Away from towns, homesteaders must sometimes fight fiercely to protect their property and families from bandits, be they human or Orc. Inhabitants of desolate areas often have many hunting long arms ready, and some set traps for the unwary. Thus it is typically wise to announce one's self at the gate.

Any sort of (literally) outlandish speech, mannerisms, or dress can make a person stand out, be they dressed in the latest fashion from the East, or wearing ethnic garb from another region. Anyone not wearing appropriate "Western" outfits will be remembered, and may experience a Reaction modifier from +1 to -3 (from curiosity to shunning). Newcomers that appear to have money may even be approached in the streets by tailors! Intra-species "racial" tension is almost non-existent due to golems and undead servants that perform the most dangerous tasks.

Science, Travel and Communication (see also p. OW 51)

In general, little scientific research is done in the West (GM willing, barring the odd Mad Alchemist). Calculation Engines may be possible, but are not practical in the dusty West. Electricity is known, but has not yet established itself outside of large towns. Some local factories have small generators for lights and mechanical apparatus (such as newspapers), but their electrical output is insignificant, enough for 100 soft light bulbs. This output is insignificant to Draw Power. Most mages seek large natural sources such as [waterfalls and hot springs](#).

The availability of medium-range high-speed travel, such as a railroad, is required to avoid a slow sprawl. In a broad sense, the trains bring raw goods and food to cities, and take people and manufactured goods out to the frontier. They also bring newspapers, catalogs, journals, and books slowly westward. To aid in this, power plants and steam engines enhanced with TL4 Elemental Furnaces and mana engines are available (see p. VE 86). There are a few areas where golems are used to extend rail lines all day and night. Typically they are employed along side Earth and Plant mages, laying the heavy rune-laden rails. In low-mana regions, they are replaced with chain gangs and Enlarged workers.

Rails artificially cordon and restrain [ley lines](#), which are pulled away from their previous location. (This displeases both Elves and Orcs.) The effect of ley lines is to raise the ambient mana by one level within it. This allows mana-dependent creatures such as golems to travel through otherwise mana-poor areas, and powerstones to recharge more quickly. Freeing a ley line requires removing the rails completely, or turning them perpendicular to the ley line. At this point most lines slowly return to their original location, although some move very quickly. Some human companies buy land with a ley line on it, move the line, and then sell the land.

A successful Vision+Magery roll allows mages to perceive ley lines . . . as long as they Concentrate. As soon as the mage stops Concentrating, things return to normal. Most can assume that train tracks will contain a ley line, but its usability may be restricted . . . The glowing area of a ley line (on average a yard in diameter, but two yards in rails) is an area of higher mana. Mages working near the lines should remember that trains are often much wider than the rails .

. .

Communication comes in many forms, from bulk mail on trains, to the "PonEx" messengers to "Spellagraph" lines, in increasing speed and cost (see "Pony Express," below). Between smaller towns, "rail mail" and spellagraph are usually both possible, although many towns are without one, the other, or both. Communication between large cities is done between dedicated Telepathy agents who can send messages without range limits (they just have to meet each other once). Messages may have to be routed between several hops and stops, even if the towns are close -- most message and rail systems run East to West. Spellagraph lines use the spells Scribe and a variant of Telecast to send messages instantly and users pay by the word (see pp. M128, M47, and M174, respectively). If the delivery destination is away from a town, paying an extra fee up front can charter a PonEx delivery agent to get the message there (see also p.

OW52).

Pony Express

PonEx is a Halfling corporation that has significant holdings in the "New World" as well as in "civilization." It employs more Halflings than any other organization. It allows the small folk to see the world relatively safely, and get paid for it (while not involving any magic rings or dragons). Their specially trained ponies can travel quickly (using the Hiking skill with Move 14, Light Encumbrance, see pp. B460, 426, 357) for up to two hours before slowing (63 miles in 2h, 168 miles per 8h day on "Good" terrain, as per p. B351). Two hours is also the interval between a typical Halfling's meals. Due to semi-Literacy, each district/small country has its own symbols and marks, identified with a specialization of the Heraldry skill.

Some special delivery options include:

- "Air Mail": letters and small parcels can be sent by homing pigeon and trained avian (see also shoulder dragon, a.k.a "Petty Drake," pp. DR54, FB83).
- "Priority Overnight" is a ceremonial casting of "Teleport Other" with extra energy traded for skill. One can save cost if there are several packages going to the same PonEx distributor in that town. Costs increase dramatically if the target is not a PonEx outlet (with a known, permanent Teleport Beacon; see p. M83), and again if they are not allowed to scry there first . . . (Note that Magery is not necessarily required to cast Teleport; see p. M147). For loads from 50 to 120 lbs, packages are sometimes sent by "Mail Mage" to personally deliver important cargo (120lbs is Heavy Encumbrance for a ST 10 Mage, double if he is wearing a Lighten Burden 2 item). Most such mages have Magery with the +10% enhancement "Solitary Ceremonial Casting" (see p. F129-130) or a familiar that can aid in Circle casting for a [higher effective skill](#). Popular familiars are those that are both light and can cling without hurting the caster (so cats are out). Mail mages are often seen with shoulder dragons, climbing lizards such as geckos and chameleons, as well as birds such as crows and hawks. Loads 50 lbs and above are likely to be carried by these mages instead of Teleport Other (see also Practical Astromancy, p. TM107).

Example 1: Letters and small packages: (<10lbs 1/2× energy costs), 900 miles (10 energy, skill -7), halved again for Beacon: net 2 energy, -3 to skill. This can be performed Ceremonially by a skill 12 caster with one unskilled observer (or familiar) for 8 energy (+6 to skill), giving an effective skill of 15, the highest effective skill for a Ceremonial casting (as per p. M12). For a regular shipment, this comes to \$10. If sent on "lower" priority, the cost may only be \$1 per letter if they are bundled every 9 lbs or so.

Example 2: A Chest of Money (150lbs, 3× energy costs), 150 miles (9 energy, skill -6), halved for Beacon: net 13 energy, -3 to skill. Ceremonially, a skill 12 mage (9 energy) with 43 energy of people can cast this at skill 15. The cost for hiring the people is at about \$50 for the hour (\$32 for the mage, and \$0.50 per person), plus beer. Beyond the level in this example, each 2 penalty increase the cost by \$7 and number of spectators by 13. Thus large items are rarely teleported more than a few miles.

Riding Animals

The favorite mount of most humans is the horse, although some groups have imported camels and llamas for use in arid and mountainous regions. Dwarves prefer low-built lizards capable of withstanding more extreme heat and cold as well as some breeds are able to grip sheer surfaces (albeit with almost no Encumbrance). Halflings are most comfortable with ponies. The favored mount of Elves is a life-extended breed of diatryma (see pp. BE49, STE120, RS112). This creature can leap great distances and glide to land on a dime. There are rumors that some can actually fly. The fearsome Orcs often keep huge semi-feral wolves that they use as mounts. These "wargs" instill fear in most opponents. If someone's first encounter with wargs is against them in combat, a Fright Check may be in order! (See Penetrating Call, a common lupine ability, pp. BE112, Update 4e 10, and CI63.) Riders wearing real spurs will receive a -1 reaction (or worse!) from those with Animal Empathy, doubled for Beast Kin. For the lizards, use the Megalogryphon template from F212, without the skull DR or Berserk. There also exist lighter versions (half mass and ST, but add Clinging). Use the below table for costs in Human lands. Double the cost of horses in foreign lands, and halve the cost of the "ethnic" animal.

Mounts

Horse*	\$60
Pony*	\$50
Diatryma	\$300
Lizard	\$80
Warg	\$200

* From p. OW119.

Bridges & Water

Train trestles may also be popular places to store Powerstones to recharge. In addition, the grid work of metal lattices has a tendency to accumulate a magical charge during high winds (similar in appearance to "[St. Elmo's Fire](#)"). The local mana level will be increased by one with a range of one yard for every five degrees of wind in the Beauford scale (see p. M194). There are some reports of unusual creatures making their nests in these higher mana areas . . .

Rafts made of cut timber are floated downstream from mountains carrying other raw goods for sale. Riverboats are popular as a fast cargo conveyor where there are no roads (see keel boats, p. OW51). Some boats are pulled by seahorses, removing the need for a riverside track (see p. F211, FB43). There are rumors of aquatic races living in the rivers and oceans, but there has been no reliable contact as of yet.

Magic Items

Retail enchantment costs are typically \$10 per energy up to 128 energy, and then \$33 per energy after that. The most popular items will be created Industrially for \$3.30 per energy. Many major retail stores can charge 25% less than that through bulk purchases and still make a hefty profit. These follow the TL7 Industrial Magic rules from pp. TM41-42, MIIII20-21 in TL5 dollars.

A standard part of most civilized (and Elven) employment is the Bless spell (see p. M129). For only one hour and \$100 or \$500, each employee will receive the equivalent bonus of several years' study in addition to safety from accidents! Many companies require that a worker sign a one or five-year contract before the business will pay for this. It is a mark of prestige for one to be considered for a level 3 Bless. This spell will still be common as "life

Example Potion: Enhanced Time Sense (ETS)

For the purpose of this potion, there are four stages a person's reaction time can be classified as: Combat Paralysis, Normal, Combat Reflexes, and Enhanced Time Sense. Each

insurance."

A popular type of weapon is a "rail gun," a weapon that can be used by anyone in the higher mana area on which trains run. They are enchanted with the spell "Throw Spell" and are usually shaped like rifles (for their high Accuracy) (see p. M128, B279). Many Elven bows have this enchantment upon them, as all Elves can cast spells.

The generic counterparts to a "rail gun" are rifle shells and arrowheads enchanted with "Blank Spell Arrow" (see p. M66). Used by a mage or anyone with a scroll and manastone, they can also carry magical effects using ordinary bows and rifles.

Scrolls are in great demand, as most citizens are at least partially literate, and in some need of spells that don't require Magery. Such spells can be loaded into "rail guns" even away from trains, and powered by one-college manastones! (3 energy, \$7 per energy capacity in industrial bulk!) Scrolls cost \$33 per point of energy (see p. M 57).

Missile Wands are less popular, since only mages (and Elves) can use them. The technique of charging, and then Quick-Drawing in a duel is popular. They are also used for hunting and target practice. Ice Sphere is the most popular Missile spell, as flame spells can easily spark wildfire in the dry grasses. Elves are especially fond of jet wands as they aid in the close-quarters fighting they often find in the forests, scrub and tall grasses. Jet wands that are exported include mud, water, and wind. Both types of wands are collectively called "Elf-guns" by those without Magery.

In native-style magic, shamans enchant non-gems with fatigue like powerstones. It requires a critical success on a craft skill, and it can store a number of points up to the degree of success. It is prepared by a mage (with Magery) using an appropriate Religious Ritual + Magery skill, and then enchanted with the Powerstone Enchantment, as usual (including quirks and stunting). It is part of the ritual skill that determines whether an item has the capacity to hold Fatigue. The IQ+Magery Sense roll from M 66 can only detect items *after* they have been Enchanted.

Spellstones come in the shape of sling stones, arrowheads, and rifle shells. While they are relatively expensive, they hold their own energy and can be activated in one second, unlike scrolls, which can take from two seconds to minutes (or longer) to activate. Spellstones are marked in ways relating to their enchantment. If not obviously labeled, it requires a IQ-based weapon roll to identify them in combat (modified by Magery or Magic Resistance). This roll should also be made (in secret) if they are *mislabelled*. A few popular examples are "Bullets of Immolation" (Create Fire), "Bang Bullets" (Destroy Air), "Bullets of Fouling" (Stench), and smoke bombs that cause Mystic Mist for quick camp setups. There are also "Plugs" (Create Earth), "Drops" (Earth to Air), "Toasters" (Create Fire), and "Unbullets" (Healing with paint shot, see p. MF8). These are collectively called "Elf-shot."

Artificial gems are commonly available. With no "real" value in the commercial gem market, they have become the staple for commercial spell casting! Use the material cost from Magic as if they were TL5 dollars. This is evident in the Spellstone costs:

1 energy \$100
2 energy \$250

dose moves one up a level. Note that it is the concurrent number of effective doses that determines how many levels' increase the subject experiences. (e.g. dose #1 lasts 2 min, dose #2 lasts 3 min. The subject experiences a two level boost for 2 min, which drops to a one level boost for one more minute). After a subject has the benefits of Enhanced Time Sense, extra doses only help extend the duration. This is not without risk, however, as in any case, each dose imbibed requires a roll against the Potion brewer's skill -- a Critical Failure causes a Heart Attack (see p. B429)! (It is up to the GM whether it is more dramatic to have the heart attack at the moment the potion is imbibed or at the end of its effect.) Despite the risks, this potion is popular among young gunslingers. The converse potion, "Buck Fever," can stop any heart attack (but not cure damage suffered), and lowers the subject's reaction time one level. The two potions taste the same to the untrained tongue. Alchemists are at -1 to differentiate them. If a dose of each are mixed together, they cancel each other out.

Duration: 3d×2 minutes

All other costs as per Speed, p. M 214

3 energy	\$400
4 energy	\$600
5 energy	\$800
6 energy	\$1,000

People (see pp. F107-110 for nonhuman racial templates)

Humans

Humans are the race that forms dense cities and even create service villages adjacent to Halfling and Dwarven cities, to cater to those things that the shorter races do not develop. It is found that if the human "half" of a community actually out-grows the non-human "half," the non-humans tend to drift away, leaving only a remnant of the previous population. This causes many towns to die out, leaving it open for the original population to return. This process annoys the longer-lived races who may see several cycles in their lifetime.

There are, of course, human poachers that kill rare animals for their trophy parts (e.g. pelts, horns) and leave the rest. They are disliked by tribes, homesteaders, and most honest city folk, while cattle owners quietly encourage the hunting of predators and dangerous wildlife. Some humans build wooden homes on the frontier made from clear-cut forest.

Both poachers and clear-cutters are disliked by Halflings, Elves, and Orcs! By contrast, there are a few human settlements that have learned to respect the Elves' ways and plant more trees than they cut down. Rumors roam that such woods are magical (bandits would say "cursed"). A few towns have let such forests surround them like a shield . .

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Human exports include: white hats of Bright Vision, black hats of Night Vision, magic bullets, 1-, 2-, and 3-point Manastones, and "Lock-on Lockets" (Beacon + Seeker)

Religion: Any.

Magic: Golems, Industrial.

Common roles and stereotypes: Merchants, city dwellers, cattle herders.

Dwarves

Dwarven communities are all underground, "where the minerals are," and many individuals go their entire lives without seeing the sky. The most adventurous Dwarves are seen prospecting for new sites for mines, but are otherwise uninterested in the overworld. The Dwarves favor tools that last, and thus purchase Halfling cooking implements over their own or humans'. Dwarves never make items of a Quality less than Fine. For 100× cost, Super Fine (+3) weapons are available (see *Ultra-Tech Third Edition*, page 62). Dwarves export distilled products of all sorts, even alchemical. Dwarven magical exports include ovens, forges, metal weapons, heat resistance items, with products like pendants of "stoking the fire," a self-heating oven, and "hair-splitting" axes (see p. B274).

Religion: Works.

Magic: Energy, Heat, Melee Weapons, Metal.

Common roles and stereotypes: Prospectors, Miners.

Elves

Holding a deep love and respect for the natural world, Elves have done some trade with more balanced human communities, and their natural magical ability has created developments in technology for both races, allowing more radical Elven factions to take up a guerilla war against the more aggressive settlements. Due to cultural precedents,

most Elves encountered are assumed to be between 70 and 170 years old. This is an age of wanderlust for Elves, and as such are considered to have a quirk-level of Reputation ("Reckless Youth," among Elves)[-1]. Older wandering Elves have a similar Reputation ("Can't Settle Down," among Elves).

Elves are rumored to have the expertise to create new ley lines. For this reason, if nothing else, many individuals want good relations with organized Elven tribes. Elves are the only characters that could normally start with spells from the [Ley Line College](#). Learning these spells requires an oath of secrecy (perhaps even a Geas), and Unusual Background of 10cp, 25cp for non-Elves. Despite the proliferation of firearms, Elves still make bows of Fine Quality (p. B277), usually enchanted with Essential Wood, Shatterproof, and a Fireproof variant that keeps them from burning (see pp. M164, 118, 73). This is in addition to any other enchantments like Loyal Sword, Quick-Aim, Puissance, and Accuracy (see pp M63, 65). Beyond this, Elves have the same penchant for Quality as Dwarves. Elven magical exports include natural tools, bows, spell arrows, and items of flame resistance. Some brand names include: "Everlast" Bows, "Flamewash" capes.

Religion: Communion with nature.

Magic: Healing, Meta, Plant.

Common roles and stereotypes: Forest and plains dwelling nature-lovers.

Halflings

Halflings prefer to live in harmony with nature, building their homes under hills. Farming using careful crop rotation to keep the soil in balance, they only keep enough animals to sustain their communities. The largest Halfling communities might match what humans call "towns." They are interested in the small-scale digging tools the Dwarves sell. Halflings export farm implements, kitchen utensils, pipes, walking staves, sling spellstones, self-lighting pipes, staff of the extra mile, self-filling maps, kegs of preservation (for milk, cheese, properly aged alcohol, and so on), and kitchen tools and utensils.

Religion: Holism.

Magic: Food, Motion.

Common roles and stereotypes: Farmers.

Orcs

The Orcs respect power, and a single Orc tribe will generally avoid a walled fort-town, and generally assume that any larger town will have a sufficient force to keep them at bay. Anything smaller might be at risk, including travelers, herds, and wagon trains. Most are not crazy enough to damage the rails, as some tribes have been virtually wiped out in retribution for that criminal act. Some less ethical groups have placed an unofficial open bounty on Orc-heads. Law enforcement in those areas has been paid . . . encouraged to take a blind eye to the "protection" of property in the region. As is understandable (and predicted), Orc tribes in the region have grown more hostile toward travelers. Orcish magical specialties include flame weapons: The "Consuming Sword" (Flaming Weapon), The "Gorget of the Dragon" (Flame Breath), and the "Spinning Fire Wheel" (war boomerang with Flame Jet).

Religion: Sacrifice.

Magic: Body, Breaking, Fire, Harming.

Common roles and stereotypes: Roaming tribes.

Varmints and Hazards

- Many magic-using bandit groups fast-grow trees in the center of rail lines to derail the train. While the passengers and crew are disoriented, the thieves can make off with valuables. It is becoming a "poplar" trick. Thus many new engines' cowcatchers have spells similar to Reshape and Shape Plant on them. Bandit groups are typically made up of outcast humans and Orcs, although the occasional disgruntled Elf is reported. Gangs vary in motive, be it unity, politics, religion, or just boredom.
- Dragons are powerful beings with alien intellects. Generally feared, they are becoming vulnerable to high-tech gadgets. Thus a few are beginning to know fear for the first time. Some become reclusive tinkers and alchemists, dedicated to understanding modern magic and science. Others lash out against these new threats, trying to remove points of advanced technology and magic. Conspiracy theorists believe that dragons are responsible for the popular dislike of the thought of air travel.
- Corrupt officials may be found in any locale -- money isn't the only commodity being traded.
- The wrenching of many ley lines in a short time can destabilize mana in some Western parts. Cartographers are adding many kinds of aspected mana to the charts. Areas of Very High Fire mana can cause paper to catch fire in the sun, and ammunition can overheat!
- Ghosts are not an uncommon sight in these wild areas, as adventurers, prospectors, and messengers have a strong sense of purpose. This is especially true in High Necromancy zones.

Adventure Seeds

To Catch A Train: The adventurers happen to encounter a group preparing to sabotage a rail line. They are spotted and offered money to not have seen this. (As a variant, they might be pleaded with to help them release the ley line to help a dying forest.)

The Circle Ends Here: The party is hired by the most prominent Halfling in the area with a top secret mission: the Halflings want an adjacent human town (on their land) to die so they can live in peace. The adventurers are authorized to do anything to disrupt traffic and human commerce, as long as no people or animals are hurt.

The Dauphin: An impetuous young Elf noble wants to "relive the glory days of his people"; he has found an ancient suit of armor and barding and wants to "rid the world of despoilers." His family wishes to keep good relations with the local human groups, and for the princeling to tire quickly, be safe, yet feel like he accomplished something (in descending order of priority).

Eagle Down: A young plains Elf approaches the group and asks for help. He needs to get to the nearby mountain summits to collect eagle down to complete a test of adulthood. Near the base of the mountain live a particularly nasty, but small, Orc tribe that lets its pet wolves roam around at night.

For added spice, there is a small group of Dwarven prospectors that could be used in any way to balance the party's successes. If they trounce the Orcs, the Dwarves could be antagonistic against "claim-jumpers," friendly if the Orcs are bothering them.

As a possible complication, the test of adulthood could restrict the Elf from using:

- Magic
- Weapons
- Climbing gear
- Food (he must fast)
- Time (he has a certain number of days to complete his test)

Eagle Has Landed: A company approaches the group and indicates that there is a rebel Elf attending a party tonight. The company has been subcontracted to help provide a deniable distraction. They want to hire the PCs to relocate the Elf's mount to a nearby warehouse so the officers can make an arrest while the Elf is confused as to its disappearance. The diatryma will be slipped a sleeping potion/drug. For extra spice, the Elf might really be a noble, and the patron is the criminal!

Hunting the Hunter: A prominent Orc Hunter is coming into an area where pro-life interests are in power. The PCs are hired to investigate the Hunter and expose evidence regarding his Orc-hunting. Quick to brag, he will exaggerate tales of his exploits in a casual setting. If their mission becomes known, he will become antagonistic.

Ley of the Land: Rumors abound of a ley line nexus near where a company wants to establish a mining/trade town. Since the party probably includes several characters with Magery, they are hired to find and chart it: "There's a Nexus in them thar hills." If none of the PCs have the Cartography skill, or they seem too organized, a bookworm NPC with the skill could be sent along.

Ley to Rest: The daughter of a local land owner's approaches the party, and offers to hire them to go looking for her fiancé. He set out to survey a new area of land purchased by her father, about four to seven days' ride from here. She gives the party a picture of him and a letter with her own seal (she hand-made a rubber stamp). In the vicinity the party will discover a ley line nexus, and inside it the remains of a camp, seemingly destroyed by wild creatures. As they investigate, a ghost matching the description of the lost man will attack them. Still disoriented from the experience, he believes that the party is sent to kill him by his future father-in-law, whom he believes never truly accepted him. Pointing out to the young man that he is already dead will cause him to pause, and showing him the letter will convince him only that the party is not his enemy.

The GM has two possible outcomes and solutions. First, the future father-in-law might be guilty. If so, the party must find proof, and bringing one of the most powerful men in the area to justice will not be easy, but it will be the most humane way to get this ghost to rest. If the future father-in-law is innocent, then the first step is finding who -- or what -- killed the young man, and then to get a magic-assisted statement of non-complicity from the older man. As an added complication, this adventure can be made more interesting if the ghost is anchored to the promise ring he received from his beloved.

Lost in the Maize: While deep in a mission, the party encounters a lost mail mage pulling a heavy 100-lb mailbag adorned with symbols that do not seem familiar. He does not have any language in common with the party. As a further complication, he could require immediate first aid to stabilize his life, and surgery later. (In this case, the language barrier could become apparent if they revive him.)

The Mail Must Go Through: A pony express rider missed their rendezvous. The heroes are the closest troubleshooters to the area. They must find the rider and provide aid; if the rider is dead, the party must complete the mission themselves.

Oh, Ley: If there was a struggle between railroad companies and settlements, it is doubly fierce in the Spellslinger world. To a town, a free ley line running through it means higher mana areas, which facilitates a more powerful magical industry, faster recharge rates, and permits non-mages can cast spells. If there is only one line in a town, a rail company passing through corrals it, and thus it no longer can pass through buildings. It also becomes modestly dangerous to cast in the area. Thus many towns fight to keep rail companies out, while others (with multiple lines) fight to get one in.

In this adventure idea, the PCs could be hired by the rail company to calm the locals, distract them with a scapegoat. The townsfolk might wish the rail building diverted by a landslide, river, or Orcs. Another option is that the hapless adventurers might just be caught in the middle, each side firmly convinced that the PCs are working for the other side.

Rung Turn: Ladders are being stolen in a multi-level human mining town. Hearsay points to a local group of mischievous youths. Alone, they are uncooperative. If cornered at their "base," they will reveal that they have seen "creepy dark forms" leaping from rooftop to rooftop . . .

Tenderfoot Ticket: The job is to protect a politician, landowner, or tourist from "out East." The guards may even be asked to stage "Western" events so the dignitary rounds up a fulfilling trip. It's then that the real bandits arrive . . . As a future sequel to this scenario, the PCs might be hired to "discourage" a different delegate from hanging around a county or state (without killing him). The troubleshooters must also deal with a small group of mercenaries protecting him from troublemakers . . .

To Catch a Dragon by the Tale: Dragons have begun to arrive in large numbers. Rumor has it that there will be a council of dragons being held this year on a nearby mountain plateau to discuss what to do about "the human situation." It is also said that there are a few parties of nonhumans invited. The heroes could be hired by practically anyone with the means to try to get the job of bodyguards, interpreters, or the like to find out what the exact agenda and decisions are . . .

Under the Gun: As private citizens can arm themselves with whatever weapons they want as long as they don't commit crimes, large landowners have been known to procure weapons from the militaries of the East. Some large weapons may include cannons, gatling guns, and war golems (officially to fight cattle rustlers or cause rain . . .). These weapons, themselves, are very attractive targets for bandits . . .

Unmarked Bells: The adventurers come across a lone mount in their travels. It seems unmarked; do they claim it as their own? (Later, they may learn of an invisible magical brand on the creature, designed to keep the beast pristine while marking it as belonging to someone). Regardless, roping it is only the first step!

The Unwanted Man: The mercenaries must hunt down a dangerous criminal with a bounty on his head. He has hidden among a tribe of Orcs, passing the preliminary rituals for membership. If the hunters are fast, they can get him away before his membership is finalized; if the villain succeeds in joining, the rest of the tribe will die to protect him. If the heroes aren't fast or clever enough, there remains one other way to get him out of the tribe: One (or more) of the PCs must also join the tribe, and then challenge him!

X Marks the Spot: A mastermind is creating an artificial nexus by dragging two ley lines together to a specific point, thus changing the area to high mana . . . The archfiend will try to escape by riding a line back as it "snaps" to its original location.

Useful Resources

Pyramid

- ["Circus Maximus"](#) by Stephen Dedman
- ["The Cursed Gold Mine"](#) by Brian Rogers
- ["Great Rope Bridge"](#) by Brian Rogers
- ["High Noon"](#) by Brian Rogers (*GURPS Third Edition* dueling)
- ["Ley Line College"](#) by Joshua Roby
- ["Martial Arts of Yrth"](#) by David Moore
- ["Necktie Party"](#) by Dylan Craig
- ["Roadkell"](#) by Loki Carbis
- ["The Treasure of the Golden Hills"](#) by Aaron Rosenberg

Media

- *Outlaw Star* (for the "Caster" spellguns)
- *Trigun* (A futuristic western, involving a man with a bounty on his head)
- *The Adventures of Brisco County, Junior* (A Steampunk comedy television series with Bruce Campbell and John Astin)
- *Iron Dragon* ([Board Game](#)) ([PC Game](#))

Crisis on Alternate Yrths: Alternate *Banestorms*

"This book presents a picture of Yrth at a particular date, with many great forces and conflicts in motion. But, it's the mark of heroes that their actions make a difference; they can and do change the world."

-- Phil Masters and Jonathan Woodward, **GURPS Banestorm**

With the long and ardently awaited arrival of **GURPS Banestorm** comes, inevitably, the slightly less ardently awaited arrival of a column spinning campaign frames off of it. All three of these scenarios, initially at least, follow the standard **GURPS Banestorm** assumptions. The Banestorm blows smallish groups of people between our Earth and a fantasy world called Yrth. (Although a Banestorm that blows people to the Cretaceous Era, or Atlantis, or Xothique would be interesting as well.) The dates on Earth and Yrth are synchronized; if Marco Polo's caravan vanishes in the Takla Makan on Earth in 1273, he reappears at the edge of the Great Desert on Yrth in 1273. Of course, it might be more fun if he appears in Sahud in the present day (Sahud not existing per se in the 13th century), and indubitably more of the sourcebook becomes usable if the alternate Banestorm blows not merely between worlds but between centuries. Hence, a few suggestions about where in the modern world of Yrth the following guests might best fit seem not unreasonable under the circumstances. And of course, once we've unhinged the Banestorm from its strict course, who's to say that it can't loft these three campaign seeds far and wide indeed -- into the Forgotten Realms, or Middle-Earth, or your own home fantasy campaign, or anywhere else with a big book of applecarts just waiting to get blown over? Not me, surely. And even if I did say such a thing, you could barely hear it over the rising of the winds.

"After this the Duke of Medina assembled all his forces that were lefte, and founde that he had lost but six shippes of all sorts. And then gave order for them to retorne to Spaine: But about Norway the greate tempest tooke them"

-- from the testimony of Don Luis de Cordoba

It is perhaps insufficiently appreciated, especially amongst Tudor enthusiasts such as myself, that the Spanish Armada essentially shrugged off the worst that Sir Francis Drake and the Royal Navy could throw at it. Of the original 130 ships, only six were lost in the naval actions at Gravelines and the panicked flight from the Calais fireships. The Duke of Medina-Sidonia, admittedly nobody's ideal of an admiral, had kept his fleet intact as he sailed north. The absence of usable harbors in the Netherlands, not the "sea dogs," kept Parma's army out of London. The Armada could fight another day -- until the hurricane hit, an anomalous hurricane farther north than any known to history. As the Elizabethan medals put it: "God blew and they were scattered." And in this flap of the butterfly's wings, rather than blowing the Invincible Armada onto the rocks of Ireland, the hurricane blew it onto the seas of Yrth.

Taking stock, Medina-Sidonia could count on 125 ships (22 of them purpose-built fighting galleons), mounting around 2,300 guns and holding 17,500 soldiers and 7,500 crewmen, plus surgeons, "voluntarie gentlemen," artillerists (and a 33-gun siege train), and servants. By an odd coincidence, the Armada arrives in the waters of Araterre just as Megalos' Purification of the Isles is underway. The Spanish find themselves between two fires -- extirpating Protestantism is the worthiest of goals, but the Emperor of Megalos demands they surrender their cannon. To start with. Perhaps the result is a "counter-Purification," resulting in a Most Catholic Duchy of Las Islas (supported by the native Jesuits) mounting a gunpowder challenge to Megalos from a position of purest Catholic orthodoxy. Or, if Medina-Sidonia chooses the better part of valor, perhaps a conquistadorial expedition to Bilit could overturn the demon-worshipping savages and build a New New Spain on its ruins, one that would likewise challenge Megalos albeit from a safer distance. The real question in either campaign is the magical one -- do any of the men of the Holy Armada carry within them the taint of sorcery? And if so (or if native magicians can be recruited), how do the 180 priests in the Armada's crew react? An "inside the Armada" campaign can present the questions of magic, loyalty, religion, and conquest on all sides, with the PCs holding the balance. It is tempting to slip the Armada forward 400 years, to come to the rescue of Castle Defiant and turn the tide against the orcs -- the Armada as good guys in a bad place. Of course, they will draw the attention of the Djinn Lands then

You could play this same story out on land with a storm-lost Roman legion or Union regiment (pace Turtledove or Fortschen), or even blizzard-ridden Wehrmacht (or Red Army) armored division; any large group that combines military advantage, social cohesion, and ideological zeal makes an ideal monkeywrench in the Megalan works. (Maybe

that's where the Republican Guard went in Iraq -- the Baathist "Hammurabi Division" would make quite a bloody splash in Shi'ite Al-Haz.) Remember, the higher the technology, the faster it will degrade as parts break and ammunition gets fired off. The newcomers must strike hard and fast to keep a place in this new world.

"Day came about six, and presented to those on shore a seizing and terrific spectacle. In the pressure of the squalls the bay was obscured as if by midnight, but between them a great part of it was clearly if darkly visible amid driving mist and rain. The wind blew into the harbour mouth. Naval authorities describe it as of hurricane force. It had, however, few or none of the effects on shore suggested by that ominous word, and was successfully withstood by trees and buildings. The agitation of the sea, on the other hand, surpassed experience and description."

-- Robert Louis Stevenson, *Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa*

In the spring of 1889, the world was waiting for war to break out in the harbor at Apia, Samoa. America and Germany, two newly-minted imperial powers, had claimed the islands as theirs, and tensions mounted when both nations sent their Pacific Fleets to show the flag. Admiral Lewis A. Kimberley, Civil War veteran, commanded the *USS Trenton* (450 men, 26 guns), the *USS Vandalia* (230 men, 8 guns), and the *USS Nipsic* (190 men, 7 guns); the German command was split between the *SMS Adler* (127 men, 10 guns) of Kapitan Fritze (technically the senior captain on station) and the *SMS Olga* (300 men, 14 guns) of the aristocratic Freiherr von Ehrhardt, with the *SMS Eber* (87 men, 3 guns) rounding out the set. Even the Royal Navy had an ironclad corvette there, the *HMS Calliope* (289 men, 26 guns and one torpedo tube) under Captain Henry C. Kane, with unknown orders. But on March 16, 1889, Mother Nature trumped presidents and kaisers alike, when a typhoon slammed into the bottle-like harbor. On Earth, the result was a peaceful partition of the Samoas -- but nearby, the result was a mystery as the strange winds swept the bay clean.

The Germans arrive off al-Wazif, the Americans off Cardiel, and the British off Dyecastle Island, and immediately set local politics roiling. An ambitious sheikh throws in his lot with von Ehrhardt and announces that his court Sufi holy man is the Mahdi; the "Cardiel Yankees" busily set about transforming society in fine "Lord Kalvan" style, trading technology to the dwarves of Zarak in exchange for industrial support. Megalos is torn between two threats, and the once-loyal Templars seem to have thrown in their lot with the British on the basis of some farcical secret handshake! This scenario, a storm of sudden chaos, has a few salient features. First, the Samoa steam-and-sail fleets represent probably the highest level of technology that the medieval-Renaissance economy of Yrth can maintain or reverse-engineer. (With the exception of shells or rifled breechloading cannon -- although there are alchemists and those dwarves.) Second, the new technologies are scattered in large lots, straining the resources of the Ministry of Serendipity and its partners. Third, the newcomers have their own rivalries, which drive their politics; should it come down to it, the American fleet, although the heaviest and largest, has only one partial ironclad (the *Nipsic*); all the German ships are modern steel hulls. It might be fun if all three sets of newcomers are simply "magic sinks," untouchable (for good or ill) by magic, for a weird *Unknown Worlds* kind of take. There were also nine other merchant ships of various classes in Apia harbor on March 16, 1889, these (or the rivalry between Fritze and von Ehrhardt, or the mutinous tendencies of the ill-disciplined captain and crew of the *Nipsic*) can add wild cards to the scenario likewise.

"When it got near, the wind, which had been scorching our faces with its hot breathlessness, changed suddenly; and, after waiting a moment, blew bitter cold and damp upon our backs. It also increased greatly in violence, and at the same time the sun disappeared, blotted out by thick rags of yellow air over our heads. We stood in a horrible light, ochreous and fitful. The brown wall of cloud from the hills was now very near, rushing changelessly upon us with a loud grinding sound. Three minutes later it struck, wrapping about us a blanket of dust and stinging grains of sand, twisting and turning in violent eddies, and yet advancing eastward at the speed of a strong gale."

-- T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

In April or early June of 1917 (the records are spotty at best), a team of 32 men commanded by two sheikhs and Captain T.E. Lawrence climbed up a steep ridge in the southern Syrian desert and into a sandstorm. In our Earth, when it cleared, they continued on their way to Aqaba and eventual glory; on a world where the sandstorm was touched with balefire, they vanished. On Earth, Lawrence had been a figure of undeniable charisma and fitful genius; on Yrth, these mystical qualities flared to blinding. By the time he rode out of the steppelands of western al-Azif, "Aurens" was more than the sheikh of the oppressed Sunni tribes who bore the brunt of the Caliph's tax-farmers and the Megalan raider knights alike. He had Ascended, and his men swore that he rode not merely with a djinn but with an angel of

Allah. Religious turmoil and riots flared throughout eastern al-Azif and into al-Haz and even Cardiel, as fighting men felt their blood stir and joined "'Aurens the Golden One" under the banner of jihad.

This is the Mage Wars begun early, and hijacked by a commander of genius. (Historians generally beg to differ, but the Lawrence of al-Azif is the legendary Lawrence through and through.) Lawrence would gladly discard his few paltry rifles for such a war, and such a chance -- the threat he carries for the Ministry of Serendipity is more existential than his abandoned, rusting Maxim gun. This scenario puts a Great Man and a few necessary followers into the gears of Yrth, and runs with it. Rommel arriving in al-Haz to command the war against Cardiel, or Napoleon siezing power in Caithness and then moving on to Megalan imperium, or Hideyoshi unifying Sahud as a mighty warlord state, or merely Leonardo da Tredroy going around the Ministry of Serendipity by inventing things they don't yet know to ban; any such variant can whistle up new wonders for a new Yrth.

Scaling the Heights

for *GURPS*

by S.E. Mortimer

This is a companion article to the one titled "[Pulling Your Weight](#)" which concentrated on ropes and cordage. This article focuses on climbing. It attempts to remain as consistent as possible with existing *GURPS* material, in particular *Basic Set* and *Covert Ops*.

Introduction

Virtually all adventurous children will try their hand at climbing. It might begin with a desire to get something placed up high out of reach (or so the parent thought). They will climb tables, cupboards, bookshelves, etc. Some might experiment with placing multiple things on top of each other to create a makeshift step ladder. Eventually this experimentation will spread outdoors and kids will climb trees, fences, onto roofs, and so on. The majority of equipment in any children's playground is geared toward climbing. It seems to be a fundamental part of human nature. Most parents don't prevent their children from climbing, since it is one method the young use to learn about the world. It also helps to develop large motor skills, and builds hand and arm strength. The trick is to enable them climb *safely*. This need for safety applies in the adult world also. Only the most radical of rock climbers will attempt a climb without ropes and other safety equipment. Generally, all that is required to climb most surfaces is a pair of good shoes, a fit body, and a positive attitude. All the other stuff is only necessary in the event of a fall.

Types of Climbing

Rock Climbing: Rock climbing involves scaling near-vertical rock faces such as cliffs and crags. All that is really required is a good pair of climbing shoes and some chalk for the hands. All the other gear is only necessary if you slip. As the climber ascends he creates anchor points by the strategic placement of wedges, nuts, hexes, and cams (called protection) into cracks in the rock. The rope is then slipped through these anchor points and will catch the climber if he falls. See *Tandem Climbing* (below) for more detail.

Ice Climbing: Climbing ice surfaces -- such as frozen waterfalls or glaciers -- is similar to climbing rock surfaces except that specialized equipment is used.

Wall Climbing: Climbing the vertical face of a man-made structure such as a brick wall or a wooden palisade requires the same skills and techniques that are used for rock climbing but, like ice climbing, may utilize some specialized equipment (see *Equipment*, below)

Tree and Pole Climbing: Instead of climbing a flat wall, the surface is curved and often the climber can reach right around it. If the tree has branches low enough to grab, then it is a fairly easy matter to climb it (+5). If only the trunk is accessible then the task is more difficult. The simplest method is to throw a rope around a branch and pull yourself up. If there are no branches then the trunk must be climbed like a pole. It is possible to climb poles barefoot -- the soles of the feet are pressed firmly into the sides of the pole to hold the body weight while repositioning the hands. The technique looks a little like a squirrel climbing a tree. Spiked shoes may provide additional traction for this technique. Specialized pole-climbing spurs may also be used to make pole climbing easier (see *Equipment*, below).

Climb Ratings

The United States uses a standard rating system to describe the difficulty of various routes. There are six classes ranging from 1 (normal walking) to 5 (rock climbing). Class 6 rock faces are so smooth that they are impossible to climb with regular rock climbing equipment. Class 5 is broken down into different levels depending on difficulty.

Class 5 Rating

Climbing
Modifier

Between Two Surfaces: If two vertical surfaces are close enough (slightly less than the distance between outstretched hands), the climber can wedge himself in between and climb up. One foot is placed on each surface and the legs are extended, pushing the climber upwards. The hands support the climber's weight while the legs are recoiled to find purchase further up. The action is then repeated. This climbing maneuver has a modifier of +0. It might be useful in a narrow hallway to conceal the climber up near the ceiling, ready to ambush an unsuspecting victim passing underneath. Other situations might involve climbing a well or mine shaft. If the space is too narrow for this maneuver then the climber can slide his back up one wall and walk his feet up the other.

Running: It is possible to run up short vertical heights (just watch any Jackie Chan movie). The climber simply takes a running start and continues to run after he reaches the wall, using momentum to carry him upwards. It takes a lot of agility and practice to perform this feat, but heights of up to twice the height of the climber may be scaled in a single turn. This maneuver uses the Acrobatics skill (at a penalty of -4) rather than Climbing.

Rappelling: Rappelling allows the climber to descend a rope at a rapid pace in a controlled manner. It requires a harness and a descender ("rappelling rack"). A short length of cord can be tied in a friction knot (see *Knots*, below) just above or below the descender and attached to the harness. The friction knot acts as a self-belayer and slides down with the rappeller. If it is released, it will lock onto the rope, preventing further descent. One hand holds the friction knot and the other holds the rope down lower near the hip with the rope wrapped around the hip slightly. This lower hand acts as the brake. The rappeller slides down the rope by releasing the brake hand, enabling the rope to slide through. Heavy gloves are recommended since rope friction generates heat and can burn unprotected flesh. See *Equipment* (below) for more information on Descenders.

Tandem Climbing

Tandem climbing is a common method of rock climbing involving two working as a team. Both members wear a harness and are protected by a rope joining them together. The first climber is called the "lead climber" and he is attached to one end of the rope. The other end of the rope is held by the second climber who is called the "belayer." He feeds the rope through a belaying device up to the lead climber as it is required. At intervals along the ascent, the lead climber places "protection" into cracks in the rock. As previously mentioned, they include wedges, nuts, hexes, and cams. The correct placement of these anchor points is an important part of the Climbing skill. They have to lock into the rock and hold firm during the stress of a fall. A critical failure could mean the failure of one (or more) of these anchor points to remain secure. When the protection is secured, a pair of carabineers (joined with nylon webbing) is used to attach the rope to the anchor point. Then he continues up the rock face. If he slips, the belayer grabs the rope to arrest the fall. Rope used in climbing is designed to stretch, helping to soften the sudden jerk at the end of a fall. The maximum distance of a potential fall is twice the distance between the lead climber and the closest anchor point, plus any slack left in the rope, plus the rope's stretch.

The lead climber will climb to a ledge, secure an anchor point, and tie off the rope. The two climbers then switch rolls, with the lead climber acting as the belayer from above. As the second climber ascends, he removes the anchor

5.0 to 5.4 -- beginner	+3 to +6
5.5 to 5.7 -- intermediate	+0 to +2
5.8 to 5.10 -- experienced	-1 to -3
5.11 to 5.12 -- expert	-4 to -6
5.13 to 5.14 -- elite	-7 to -9

Human Ladder

This is a useful way to scale a vertical height that isn't too tall. It involves multiple people standing on each other's shoulders until the last person reaches the required height. Once this ladder is formed it is a fairly simple matter for them to assist other climbers up to the summit. A climber must remain at the top to assist up those who formed the ladder. If the height is greater than two people then a rope might be necessary to help the person who formed the base of the ladder (unless he is skilled enough to climb up unassisted). Acrobatics or ST is needed by those who form the ladder. The person with the highest ST should form the base (or multiple people can form the base, thus sharing the load between them). Scaling a human ladder requires a Climbing roll at +3. A critical failure not only injures the Climber but will also injure at least one person in the human ladder.

points and carabineers that had been secured by the first climber. These can be reused. When the second climber reaches the first, they have finished one stage, or "pitch." The climb is continued in this manner until the destination is reached. The maximum height of a single pitch is generally half the length of the rope. A typical modern climbing rope is around 150-180 feet long, so the maximum height that can be climbed at one time is 75-90 feet. Because two people are alternating positions during the climb, the climbing rate is *half* as fast as that listed on the *Climbing Table* (below). For example, a single person might climb an intermediate surface at a rate of 10 feet per minute. A tandem climb on the same rock face will be at a rate of only five feet per minute.

Climbing (p.B183, B349)

As stated in **Basic Set** (p.B183), Climbing is the ability to climb mountains, rock walls, trees, the sides of buildings, and so on. A Climbing skill roll is required whenever anything more difficult than a ladder is attempted. One skill roll is made when the climb is begun and another is made every five minutes. The table on p.B349 suggests skill modifiers for certain surfaces along with climbing speeds (this table has been expanded below). **Compendium I** (p.CI78) suggests that a successful Acrobatics roll may give an additional skill bonus or reduce time for the Climbing maneuver. If a climb is particularly easy or difficult then a Climber may wish to increase or decrease his rate of climb (see *Time Spent*, p.B346). For example, the normal rate of climb for an intermediate mountain is 10 feet per minute. An experienced climber may wish to increase this (+10% per -1 skill penalty). Increasing the rate of climb to, say, 15 feet per minute attracts an additional penalty of -5 to the Climbing roll.

Difficult climbs require not only high dexterity but good strength in the arms, hands, and fingers. Strength may partially compensate for a low Climbing skill on many occasions and, if the GM chooses, he may give bonuses to Climbing rolls if the character has high ST (for example, ST 12+ may give +1; ST 15+ may give +2). Long, difficult climbs also require good endurance. If the GM chooses, he may also require a HT roll (modified by fitness) every time a Climbing skill roll is made (not including the first one). A failed roll means the loss of one point of Fatigue. Experienced climbers look for small ledges on the rock face to enable them to rest in the middle of a climb. As stated on p.B349, one Climbing roll is made at the start of the climb and another one is made every five minutes. Any failed roll results in a fall (see *Falling* p.B431).

Failure: In a gaming situation, unless important to the story, the progress of a climb isn't noted; on a fall, a rule of thumb might be to assume that the climber was half way into the climb. Another option is to roll randomly to see how high the climber was when he lost his grip. On a normal failure, if the GM is feeling generous he might allow a second Climbing roll to see whether the climber can regain a handhold before plunging to his doom (assuming he isn't secured by a rope). A success on this second roll may mean a short slide down the surface, resulting in minor injuries, but nothing fatal. On a critical failure, even a rope may not be enough to prevent falling. Ropes can break, knots can untie, pitons can work loose from the rock, and so on. A critical failure during a Climbing maneuver generally results in a potentially life threatening fall (unless the height being climbed is very short).

Climbing with Assistance

Often when more than one person attempts a climb, one climber is more experienced than another. There are two ways to model this. Assuming that the situation involves a *tandem climb* as described above, the GM rolls the lower of the two Climbing skills. This is the most risky but allows the full climbing rate to be maintained (five feet per minute on an intermediate surface). A safer option is to allow the experienced climber to assist the less experienced one. This can be modeled by rolling against the highest of the Climbing skills and apply the amount by which the roll succeeds or fails as a modifier to the other person's Climbing roll. This is a safer option but it is slower. The climbing rate is *halved* (or a quarter of what the normal unassisted climb rate would be).

Climbing in Combat

One's Climbing skill might come in handy during some combat situations. Examples include the rigging of a ship, on a narrow cliff ledge, hanging from a rope, and the like. Treat attacks in a similar manner as mounted combat (p.B397)

but instead of Riding, use either the Climbing skill or an appropriate combat skill, whichever is *lower*. Whenever a Step is performed during this sort of combat, a Climbing roll must be made. A successful roll enables the attacker to perform other actions such as Attack or Defense. Failure results in a potential fall. On the next turn he may scramble for a hand hold to prevent the fall (he will drop anything being carried in his hands). This requires another Climbing roll and during this turn no other action may be performed. Any contested maneuver (e.g. moving into Close Combat) requires a contest of Climbing skills. Whenever the character experiences stunning or shock (e.g. from taking damage) a Climbing roll is needed to prevent falling.

Knots

Knots are an essential part of climbing if ropes are involved. The Knot-Tying skill (p.B203) is used to tie knots successfully. There are six essential knots a climber must know.

Single-loop knots: A single loop is useful when you need to throw a rope over something such as a post or when you need to attach something to a loop of rope. Examples include *bowline*, *figure-8 loop*, *in-line figure-8 loop*, and *butterfly* knot.

Double-loop knots: Two loops are often more secure than a single loop, and are handy for hoisting or lowering a large or heavy object -- including an injured person. Examples include *double figure-8 loop*, *French bowline*, and *Birmingham bowline*.

Hitch knots: This knot is useful for securing a rope to a solid object such as a pole or a ring. Examples include *clove hitch*, *bunt line hitch*, *constrictor hitch*, *highwayman's hitch*, and *anchor bend*. The clove hitch is one of the simplest to tie and can be easily adjusted.

Stopper knots: These knots prevent the end of a rope from sliding freely through it. Examples include *figure-8*, *heaving line*, and *double overhand*.

Bends: A bend is a knot that ties the ends of two ropes together. Examples include the *sheet bend* and the *full carrick bend*.

Friction knots: A friction knot wraps around a secondary rope multiple times, preventing it from sliding. Uses include backing up an abseil (see *Rappelling*, above) and making a crude *ascender* (see *Equipment*, below). The more wraps, the more friction that is applied. Examples include the *prusik*, *klemheist*, *bachman*, and *autoblock*.

Equipment

Hand and Footwear: Appropriate shoes are necessary for climbing. Good quality footwear should be lightweight, fit snugly, be flexible on the sole but firm at the toes, and allow a good grip. Gloves aren't all that useful for climbing but are handy when handling rope -- especially belaying and rappelling. Climbing gloves are made of leather and have the finger tips removed so as not to hinder climbing. They may be used for rappelling but the climber must take care not to burn his exposed fingers. Chalk dust is commonly used on the fingers to improve one's grip; if gloves are not worn then dust is applied to the palms too. If both the hands and feet are properly equipped, they will cancel -1 from any penalties for climbing a vertical surface. Inappropriate gloves and footwear (e.g. solid boots) might give additional penalties to the Climbing roll. Good climbing shoes cost around \$120; weight 1 lb. Fingerless leather gloves cost \$30; weight 0.25 lb.

Rope (TL0): This is the most basic and universal climbing tool. One end is secured to an anchor-point and the character hauls himself up or down its length. When climbing up a rope the rate is 20 feet per minute at a penalty of -2. Climbing down is only a -1 modifier. Without rappelling equipment (see *Descender*, below) the rate of descent is 30 feet per minute. For detail about the cost and weight of different types of rope see [Pulling your Weight](#). Rope may be made into a crude ladder by tying knots at regular intervals to make climbing easier. The Climbing modifier for a knotted rope is -1 to ascend and +0 to descend.

Harness (TL5): A light harness with fittings for a variety of climbing gear (p.CV54). When used with a rope it gives +1 to Climbing rolls and prevents the climber from falling. It allows him to hang in midair and to pivot sideways or hang upside down, and leaves the hands free to drive in a piton, pick locks, plant explosives, etc. It may also be used in conjunction with a *Descender* (see below) for rappelling.

Pitons (TL2): These are spikes or knife-shaped wedges with an eyelet in the end. Rope or cord is threaded through the eyelet. These are useful when there are no handholds in the vertical surface. The piton is forced into a crack (or hammered into wood or ice) far enough to support one's body weight. The climber steps on this piton and proceeds to drive in a second piton further up. The climber steps up to this second piton and yanks on the cord to remove the first piton so it may be reused. Pitons can be tricky to use in this fashion since they must be driven in deep enough to support one's body weight, but not so far that they cannot be removed by tugging on the cord. If used this way, pitons remove up to -2 in penalties for climbing a vertical surface. Alternatively, the pitons may be driven in deeper so that they are more secure. If used this way, they remove up to -3 in penalties but cannot be easily removed, so they may only be used once each per climb. This method is safer since a rope and carabineer may be attached to each piton to prevent falling. Each piton costs \$4 and weighs 0.75 lb. An appropriate hammer costs around \$10 and weighs 1 lb. They may also be used as crude throwing knives (-2 to skill).

Spikes (TL2) and Cups (TL6): As stated in *Covert Ops* (p.CV54) climbing spikes and suction cups are exotic but do exist. These devices attach to the hands and feet and improve one's grip on a surface. Spikes (e.g. ninja climbing claws) are useful on craggy surfaces, wood, soft stone, etc. Suction cups work on smooth surfaces such as glass, glazed tile, polished metal, etc. It takes four minutes to fit them to the hands and feet (one per minute). They cancel up to -2 in penalties for climbing a vertical surface of the appropriate type. A complete set of four spikes or cups costs \$150 and weighs 2 lbs.

Pole Climbing Spurs (TL2): These hook under the heel and strap to the side of a pair of sturdy boots (one strap around the ankle, the other around the calf). The spurs point down, digging into the sides of the pole and holding the climber's weight. A pair of climbing spurs cancel up to -2 in penalties for climbing a wooden pole or tree trunk. Cost \$200, weight 5 lbs.

GeckoGrip (TL9): The soles of a gecko's feet consist of millions of tiny hairs called *setae*. These enable the gecko to cling to virtually any surface through the interaction of *van der Waals* forces. Synthetic gecko hairs have already been developed in the laboratory and work exactly the same as those of a gecko, but the cost of manufacture is currently too high for mass production. In the near future it will be possible to cover the soles of the feet and the palms of the hands with *GeckoGrip*. *Covert Ops* (p.CV53) suggests that it should support a total weight of 800 lbs and will allow a person to cling to the surface of a wall or even a ceiling so long as at least three limbs remain in contact. Removing contact involves peeling the *GeckoGrip* off the surface just like lifting adhesive tape. Unlike adhesive tape, *GeckoGrip* is self-cleaning. Cost \$2,000, weight 2 lbs. Once the user is familiar with *GeckoGrip*, no Climbing roll should be required except under stressful conditions (GM's discretion).

Ascender (TL6): This is mechanical device that uses cams, ratchets, and the like to help the user ascend a free hanging rope (see CV54). It can slide up the rope but can't slide back down (however, a critical failure might see them lose their grip on the rope). Typically two ascenders are used -- each with a stirrup for one foot. The rope is grasped firmly with the hands and then the knees are bent, sliding the ascenders up the rope with the feet. The stirrups are then stood in, while the hands slide up to grab a higher section of the rope and the process is repeated (the technique is sometimes called "jugging"). A third ascender can be used if one isn't confident using hands to hold the rope. This technique allows the legs to do most of the work, taking the weight off the arms. Ascenders add +2 to Climbing when using a rope (canceling the -2 penalty). Rate of climb is one foot per second. Cost \$60; weight 0.75 lbs. A crude ascender can be made using a looped cord and a friction knot (strong shoelaces can be used in an emergency). These only add +1 and the rate of climb is only *half* as fast (one foot per two seconds).

Descender (TL6): A small metal device sometimes called a "rappel rack" (p.CV54). It assists in rappelling down a rope; if used in conjunction with a harness, it adds +3 to the Climbing roll when descending down a vertical surface (e.g. the side of a building) and +1 when descending down a free-hanging rope (e.g. out of a helicopter). Using a descender also increases the rate of descent. Without it, the rate of decent is about one foot every two seconds. With a

descender, the speed is 12 feet per second. Without a descender and harness, rappelling rolls are made at -2, or -5 if you lack gloves as well. Cost \$40, weight 1 lb.

Deceleration Device (TL7): As mentioned above (see *Rock Climbing*, above), when tandem climbing, the second climber acts as a belayer or "fall arrester" by grabbing the rope if the first climber falls. If the climber is working alone then a deceleration device attached to the harness can take the place of the belayer, applying a brake to the rope and stopping the climber from falling further. This device also dissipates a substantial amount of energy during a fall arrest so that the "jerk" at the end of the fall is much less violent. Cost \$100; weight 1 lb.

Ladder: Ladders are made of wood or metal (aluminum is common because it is lightweight), consisting of two side rails joined at regular intervals by crosspieces called rungs (or "cleats"). The climber leans a ladder against the climbing face and slowly ascends or descends by stepping on the rungs one at a time. The climber's hands grip either the side rails or the rungs above. Some ladders are self-supporting (usually by means of a long, fold-out bracket) so that they don't need to be leaned against a surface. A climbing roll is not required to climb a ladder. A person can usually ascend or descend one rung per second (there is normally about a foot between each rung), but in combat he may ascend three rungs per second and descend two rungs per second. The standard distance between rungs is 10" but this may vary by an inch or two either way. If a person wishes to move faster, then the GM may require a Climbing roll. Prices and stats for ladders can be found in any hardware catalog.

Flexible Ladder: Similar to a regular ladder except that the side rails are made of rope or chain. The rungs may be made of the same flexible material or they may be more rigid. This type of ladder may be rolled up for easier storage but it won't remain stationary when a person attempts to climb it. It swings and sways and takes longer to climb than a rigid ladder. Normally a person may climb one rung every two seconds but in combat this may be increased to one rung per second.

Sectional Ladder. As its name suggests, a sectional ladder is divided into several 10-foot long aluminum sections. The climber places the bottom section against the base and climbs to the top carrying another ladder section with him. Once at the top he inserts the second section into the first one creating a ladder that is twice as long. He then climbs back down to get the next section and repeats the process until he is at the required height. Alternatively the climber may assemble the ladder on the ground and then lean it against the climbing face. Each 10-foot section comes with a spiked bracket to attach the ladder to the face and to hold it out a few inches to provide toe-room for climbing.

Climbing Pole: The end of a pole with a rake-like hook on one end is hooked over the top of a wall and aligned at an angle away from the wall. The climber pulls himself up with his hands on the pole while walking up the wall with his feet. This device is limited to a wall up to about 15 feet in height. It may also be used as a type of pole arm in combat. Cost \$150; weight 5 lbs.

Grapnels

Unless someone is at the top of the climb to secure the rope, you will need something to hold the end of the rope in place while you climb. There are two types of tools that involve either hooking around an object (grappling hook) or sticking into an object (spike or harpoon).

Grappling hook (TL1): This hook consists of three or four metal hooks fixed to a rigid spine that has an eyelet in the end for attaching a rope. More advanced grappling hooks are spark-free and have a matt black finish to lower visibility. They can be padded to muffle any noise. Cost \$50, weight 2.5 lbs. Use the *Throwing* rules on B355 to determine how far you can throw a grappling hook without mechanical assistance.

Harpoon (TL2): This is a long spike with a hardened steel tip and an attached rope. The harpoon is intended to be fired into an object so that it sticks into it, providing a fixed anchor point for the rope. If fired with enough force, the harpoon may be driven into stone or concrete. Cost \$30; weight 2 lbs.

Line Throwers (p.CV54)

These devices designed to fire a rope further than it can be physically thrown.

Crossbow (TL2): A crossbow may throw a weighted rope or grapnel up to half its maximum range horizontally or a quarter if fired vertically. See **Basic Set** for details (p.B276).

Pneumatic Line Thrower (TL7): Originally developed for sea rescues, it uses compressed air to lob a rope up to 75 yards horizontally. Range drops to 25 yards if a grapnel is fired vertically. Treat as a normal ranged attack using Guns (Rifle) skill but at a -1 penalty because of bulk and poor accuracy. Cost \$500; weight 15 lbs. Replacement gas cartridges cost \$5 and weigh 0.1 lb.

Grenade Launcher (TL8): A grenade launcher such as the Colt M79 can fire a line or grapnel up to 75 yards. Treat as a normal attack using Guns (Grenade Launcher) skill, but at a penalty of -1 because of bulk and poor accuracy.

Rocket Thrower (TL8): This is a disposable rocket that can carry a line up to 300 yards. It normally doesn't have a grapnel but may be modified using Armoury (Small Arms) skill. Cost \$700; weight 9 lbs (not including grapnel). Treat as a normal attack using Guns (LAW) skill, but at a penalty of -1 because of bulk and poor accuracy.

Tactical Pneumatic Line Thrower (TL8): This is an advanced line thrower specifically designed for tactical operations. It is more accurate than the TL7 marine model and can lob a "messenger line" (1/8") with a titanium weight over 100 yards horizontally. If a heavier line (3/8") and grapnel is deployed instead then the range drops to around 40 yards vertically. It may also deploy a flexible ladder and grapnel 15 yards vertically. Treat as a normal ranged attack using Guns (Rifle) with a +0 modifier. Cost \$2,500; total weight of the kit including 150 yards of 1/8" DACRON cord and a lightweight titanium grapnel is 18 lbs.

Winches

A mechanical or electrical device which turns a capstan, winding a rope around it. These devices replace the user's Climbing skill with the skill of the device and ignores any penalties for poor climbing surfaces. If the winch is kept in good condition, then it has an inherent Climbing skill of 16, so it usually will only fail on a roll of 17 (normal failure) or 18 (critical failure), unless the conditions are unfavorable. For example, the user is unfamiliar with the device, bad weather, excessive loads, unsuitable rope, etc., will add penalties to the Climbing roll.

A winch with an *external* capstan has the device anchored to the ground. A pulley is attached to the top of the climb (possibly attached to a harpoon and fired from a line thrower) with a rope fed through it. As the rope winds around the capstan, the other end of the rope slowly rises awards the pulley. The advantage of this is that there is no limit to the size of the rope or the power source, since it remains on the ground. The maximum height of the climb is usually *half* the length of the rope, but if the winch can be fixed to the top of a climb, then a pulley is not required and the maximum height of the climb equals the total length of the rope.

Smaller, *integral* winches are a sci-fi staple. They are basically a mini electric winch mounted into some sort of harness that attaches to the climber. There are a lot of difficulties in designing one of these since the entire device must be carried by the climber. The cable needs to be thin because the capstan cannot be too large, and the power source needs to be fairly small and lightweight. They also have problems with overheating. At present, mini electric winches are still in the cinematic realm of science fiction.

Mechanical Winch (TL7): There is no external power device since it is manually driven. Simply attach it to your harness, turn the crank, and up you go. A suitable winch would have a maximum load of around 350 lbs. including 20 yards of 3/16" Aramid cord, it weighs around 20 lbs and costs \$150. Climbing speed is about 7 feet per minute. The speed can be increased to around 10 feet per minute but it is exhausting. The user will lose one point of Fatigue per minute.

Electric Winch (TL8): This is far more bulky than the gadgets depicted in the movies. An electric winch capable of lifting 250 lbs would weigh about 20 lbs including 20 yards of 3/16" Aramid cord. Add to this the weight of the battery pack which would weigh maybe 15 lbs. Rate of ascent would be slow, perhaps 30 feet per minute. The battery would

only be good for one ascent before it needs recharging. Cost \$500.

PowerQuick™ (TL8): Developed by Quoin International, this is a battery-powered device that utilizes a series of wheels and cogs to pull a rope *through* it, enabling a large weight to quickly move up the rope. Unlike a winch, PowerQuick allows the rope to run through the device rather than winding it around a capstan. PowerQuick is compatible with most climbing harnesses but it must use half-inch braided rope for it to work correctly. PowerQuick can also be used for controlled, unpowered descents at a rate of around three feet per second. There are currently two models. The lighter model is capable of lifting 325 lbs at a rate of 1.5 feet per second; cost \$8,000; weight 18 lbs (including battery). The heavier one is capable of lifting 500 lbs at a rate of 1 foot per second; cost \$9,000; weight 28 lbs. They have a "dead-man switch" so that if the climber lets go of the device it will stop and hold position on the rope. An optional remote control is also available. The rechargeable battery (NiMH) has a duration of approximately 12 minutes or about 600 feet. The battery pack weighs 14 lbs and costs \$300. The charger weighs 3 lbs and costs \$100.

Another, smaller model currently in development for the military will enable a weight of around 220 lbs to be lifted at a rate of 10 feet per second. Instead of electric batteries it will utilize an engine and a solid propellant cartridge. Each cartridge will only enable a single lift up to a maximum of 100 feet but it can be replaced in a few seconds -- each new cartridge providing an additional 100 feet (10 seconds of lift). The device should weigh around 10 lbs. Cost might be between \$12,000 and \$15,000.

Mini-Winch (TL9): As mentioned above, these are cinematic devices. In the future, if power storage devices can be made small enough with a high energy density, there is no reason why a personal mini-winch cannot be developed. **Covert Ops** (p.CV54) suggests that a motor winch might be able to lift up to 400 lbs at a rate of five yards per second. Cost \$400; weight 6 lbs. More advanced versions might use nanowire and machinery that is miniaturized even further.

Climbing Table

The Climbing Table on p.B349 has been expanded. As noted, in most cases the climber uses the speeds in the "Regular" column. The "Combat" column is for climbs inspired by rage or terror, which always cost at least 1 FP.

Type of Climb	Modifier	Combat	Regular
Ladder (rigid) going up	no roll	3 rungs/sec	1 rung/sec
Ladder (rigid) going down	no roll	2 rungs/sec	1 rung/sec
Ladder (flexible)	no roll	1 rung/sec	1 rung/2 sec
Human ladder	+3	3 ft/sec	1 ft/sec
Tree (accessible branches)	+5	1 ft/sec	1ft/3 sec
Tree (no accessible branches)	+0	1 ft/3 sec	10 ft/min
Mountain (see Climb Ratings, above)			
5.0 to 5.4 -- beginner	+3 to +6	1 ft/sec	15 ft/min
5.5 to 5.7 -- intermediate	+0 to +2	1 ft/2 sec	10 ft/min
5.8 to 5.10 -- experienced	-1 to -3	1 ft/5 sec	5 ft/min
5.11 to 5.12 -- expert	-4 to -6	1 ft/10 sec	2 ft/min
5.13 to 5.14 -- elite	-7 to -9	1 ft/20 sec	1 ft/min
Vertical Stone wall	-3	1 ft/5 sec	4 ft/min
Modern building	-3	1 ft/10 sec	2 ft/min
Rope going up	-2	1 ft/sec	20 ft/min
using ascenders	+0	2 ft/sec	1 ft/sec
Rope going down	-1	2 ft/sec	30 ft/min
rappelling	-1	12 ft/sec	12 ft/sec
Rope (knotted) going up	-1	2 ft/sec	30 ft/min
Rope (knotted) going down	+0	3 ft/sec	40 ft/min
Winch (mechanical)	n/a	1 ft/6 sec	7 ft/min
Winch (electric)	n/a	1 ft/2 sec	1 ft/2 sec
PowerQuick (325 lbs)	n/a	1.5ft/sec	1.5ft/sec

PowerQuick (500 lbs)	n/a	1 ft/sec	1 ft/sec
PowerQuick (220 lbs)	n/a	10 ft/sec	10 ft/sec

Links

- Rock Climbing -- <http://www.rockclimbing.com/>
- Rock Climbing Hand Techniques -- <http://climbing.about.com/od/howtoclimb/ss/rocktechniques.htm>
- Ascenders (a comparative review) -- <http://www.gearreview.com/ascenders.asp>
- Rock Climbing Knots -- <http://www.thechipster.com/rockclimb.html>
- Pneumatic Line Throwers -- <http://www.rescuerocket.com/products.html>
- *PowerQuick(r)* is distributed by Bonanza Products Inc. -- <http://www.bonanzaproducts.com/>
- Synthetic Gecko Setae -- <http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn3785>

Pyramid Review

Blowing Up Hong Kong (for Feng Shui)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Chris Jones with Will Hindmarch

Illustrated by J. Scott Reeves

96-page softback; \$19.95

As a reviewer I do not always get my facts right. On occasion I have made mistakes and I occasionally still make them. One such error appeared back in 2001 in [In Your Face Again](#), the scenario anthology for [Feng Shui](#), the Hong Kong action movie RPG. In said review, I opined that Atlas Games should take the time to update the game from the end of the period when Hong Kong was administered by the British to take into account the fact that the city and territories were then and now back under Chinese control. Quite rightly I was corrected at the time by Bruce Baugh, that the rulebook made clear that it was not going to happen. The Contemporary juncture would always remain 1996, just as the other junctures -- AD 69, 1850, and 2056, would not advance in time either.

All that changes with the release of ***Blowing Up Hong Kong***, a guide to the city that lies at the heart of the game. Besides describing the city and its surrounding environs, the major point of the book is that it updates the Contemporary juncture to 2005 and, in doing so, places the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region firmly under Chinese authority. This updating *only* applies to the Contemporary juncture, and none of the other three have been moved on in time. And while the book takes a look back at the city's history as well as pushing its future forward up until the 2056 juncture, this is very much a guide book to the Hong Kong of the here and now.

Blowing Up Hong Kong is intended for use by both players and GM, and is written as a fictionalized guide, only touching upon elements of ***Feng Shui's*** Secret War rather than laying it all out for you. This is intentional; as such details of the Secret War can not only change as a result of in-game events, but will also be different from one game to another. As ever, the book is laid out in the usual fashion for the line and neatly organized for ease of both use and digestion. Photography rather than artwork dominates the look of the book; this is no surprise, considering that it is a guidebook. It is also clear from both the writing and the introduction that the author knows and loves Hong Kong.

Of course, a travel guide has to do a number of things. It has to present a geographical guide to the area covered and tell you how to get around it, fill you in on the peoples and their customs, suggest the best places to eat at, buy from, see, and be seen in. ***Blowing Up Hong Kong*** does all that. It begins with facts at a glance -- area code, emergency number, languages, currency, and voltage; smells (mostly diesel fumes, meat, fish, and ordure); sights (lots of neon and red banners); and sounds (a riot of moving and honking cars, blaring ships' horns, shouting voices, firecrackers, and the occasional temple procession). Hong Kong's many districts are described as well as how to get around them, whether by Kowloon-Canton Railway (to the New Territories and beyond to mainland China), the Metro or MTR (Mass-Transit Rail), cars, motorcycles, yachts, or boats.

This is of course the basics, because ***Blowing Up Hong Kong*** includes two words not normally found in the title of your off-the-shelf guide book. "Blowing" and "Up." What the book includes under this simple pair is all of the weirdness you need, but without delving too much into the Secret War. This ranges from the advice that you should not ride the Mid-Levels Escalator (the world's longest escalator that runs from the base of Victoria Peak and up) at certain times of the year, to a tattoo store where best body art is holographic, and the Bank of China Tower, the construction of which broke every feng shui rule. There's not just the weirdness, but also cool stuff too. Need a Rolls Royce fitted out with the best in luxury and security mod-cons? Then go see Arthur C.K. Moore, or find Tony Leung for the best in

customized smuggler's automobile or boat. Tea is of course everywhere in Hong Kong, but the tip is that the best tealeaf around is the "Golden Buddha," reputed to be truly life-enhancing. And if you pray at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, you might just gain the temporary but extraordinarily effective guidance from the ghost of Bruce Lee!

While chapters in turn cover Chinese customs, the city's nature, parks, and animals, religion and magic, cops and gangsters, hospitals, places to shop, and big buildings, it is the sections alongside all of this that further increases the weirdness quotient. Need 27 Kick-Asses To Stage A Brawl? A list gives you all that, while others give you unsolved mysteries, the locations of known Netherworld Portals, and Things To Do In Hong Kong If You're An Anarchist (or things to foil, if you are a hero).

One question that is answered is how the authorities -- in particular, the police -- deal with the weird that goes down in Hong Kong. Section 44 of the HKPD deals with all of the reports of ghosts, sorcerers, and monsters. Being assigned to the unit is often considered one step up from being dismissed from the force, as the number 44 is held to be very unlucky. It just so happens that "44" sounds like the words for "double die." Comprised of just 14 members, Section 44 is divided into three sub-units. Sub-Unit 449 are its demon slayers, Sub-Unit 446 its ghost hunters, and Sub-Unit 444 are the Death Dealers, the hardest of Section 44's members. They are so tough that they regularly go spelunking into the Netherworld!

Section 44 also benefits from a Group Schtick, first described in [*Friends of the Dragon: A Guide to Player Character Groups*](#). Essentially with the unique "Yin-Yang Yen," a Section 44 member can use his Info: Occult Skill to resist sorcery and creature Schticks, and also as a presence bonus in certain situations. The book also includes for handling Face -- a mixture of reputation and relationships -- in the game; more vehicle modifications to add to those found in *Golden Comeback*; numerology and math magic; and the concrete zombie -- what you get after burying a victim alive in wet concrete. The several new Schticks and a new set of fu powers in The Path of the Broken Island are all very useful when it comes to blowing up Hong Kong.

Despite it being updated to bring the Contemporary juncture to 2005, there is relatively little in *Blowing Up Hong Kong* that really takes it into account. The effect of which is make such details easily ignored if the GM wants to keep his game back in 1996, or as a friend suggested, used as a future that the player characters are trying to avoid or engineer. The book is an enjoyable read and contains lots and lots of useful information that can be easily added to game to give it color, flavor, and even odor! Because it describes the very city at the heart of the game, *Blowing Up Hong Kong* is probably the most useful supplement for *Feng Shui*.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Carcassonne: The Princess & the Dragon

Designed by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

30 game tiles, wooden dragon pawn, wooden fairy pawn, & rules sheet; full color, boxed; \$14.95

[Carcassonne](#) has been in a few places -- cities, castles, primeval forests -- and even a couple of time periods, but for a game with knights and castles it's been remarkably free of traditional trimmings like magic. ***Carcassonne: The Princess & the Dragon*** gives you not only the dragon and the damsel in distress, but a few other magical gifts as well.

The game comes with a wooden dragon figure, a wooden fairy pawn, and a set of playing tiles that put these pieces to work in the game. Once again, a supplement to the ***Carcassonne*** series depends mostly on slight alterations to the canonical method of play, and here it's all about putting down and picking up pawns.

The new tiles get shuffled in with the old. If you get a volcano, the dragon rises up from wherever he's been hiding and lands there; you, on the other hand, get no opportunity to play a pawn (which is just as well . . . who wants their token on the same space as a hungry dragon?). If you pull out a dragon tile, the dragon moves across the land. Players take turns moving him one space at a time, and any "meeples" he passes over in his six-space journey are returned to their owners . . .

. . . Unless, that is, they enjoy the company of the fairy (not to be confused with the princess of the supplement's title). If you forgo placing any pawns during your turn, you may instead place the fairy so it shares a tile with one of your already-placed pieces. The dragon never moves onto the fairy's tile. The fairy also gives you an extra point if you start the turn on her tile, and she improves the score if you complete the feature you share.

The princess, on the other hand, is a handful. She needs knights to protect her from the beast, which means a lot of maneuvering through secret passages with her loyal entourage. Anytime you play her special city tiles without placing units of your own, you return the knight of your choice from that city to its owner. To balance this out, drawing magic portals lets you place a pawn on any tile already laid (normally you're limited to the tile you just played). You still can't break the rules about occupying cities with your opponents' pieces, and you can't score for stuff that's already built, but you have greater latitude in how you get your units out.

There's nothing to be said against the materials. The art uses the same style, the pieces are of the same good stock, and the jig-cut dragon and fairy pawns are what fans of the games have come to expect. The fairy is a bit small, to be sure, and its size and light color make it easier to lose, but the quality is fine. The dragon is big, but only in an imposing way. You can get a grip on it, but it's not a cumbersome thing to have on the playing surface.

A lot of games doom themselves and their fan base by playing a sort of pointless one-upmanship with their supplements -- find something you can't do in the game (or another supplement), then offer a follow-up that allows just that. It seems like ***Rio Grande*** has been going down this road for a while, but it's hard to argue with success. At first glance it looks like a ham-fisted way to alter the pawn-placement rules (perhaps fans demanded such a supplement?), but then you play it. It can be almost nerve-wracking for your opponent to place a volcano and its dragon next to the city you're trying to finish, even though the beastie won't move unless and until you pull one of its tiles. There's only about a one-in-10 chance of that with just the original game; add the other supplements and it's even less likely. How many games go from strategic to suspenseful with so little work?

The various elements seem so disparate at first, like they were ideas sitting on a few drawing boards and gathered together on a minute's notice at press time, but they work together to make ***The Princess & the Dragon*** flow. Even in

such a small space, they manage to raise a few rules-lawyer questions (is not using pawns when playing volcano or princess tiles the same as *choosing* not to play, allowing you to move the fairy? Not so much of a sacrifice if it is), but for the most part it's a successful kludge that, with previous add-ons, lets players choose the things they like or dislike the most about ***Carcassonne*** and flavor the mixture to taste.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

Capes

Designed, Written, & Art by Tony Lower-Basch

[Muse of Fire Studio](#)

160 pp. softcover, \$20; or PDF, \$10

In this era of thick and heavy superhero rulebooks, a slim little volume like *Capes* seems downright casual and cute. Don't be fooled. *Capes* offers a challenge unlike any in the comic book gaming niche, one which some players will take up with glee.

In *Capes* players are "cooperating to create a comic-book story" but also "competing to have the most influence on how that story turns out." At the heart of the game is this question: "Power is fun, but do you deserve it?" Go ahead and use your powers, but remember the price of telling your story your way is to help the other players get their stories told. "The other players" is a telling turn of phrase, for *Capes* sessions have no game master. The management of the story, not to mention the handling of all characters, is done by the players as defined under the game rules. The tools of this management are index cards, paper slips, assorted tokens, and oh yes six-sided dice.

Capes characters have no "power scales" or other objective comparators. Each character ability is ranked within its category (Powers or Skills, Drives, and Styles), but that ranking reflects only how important that ability is to the character (and by extension how strongly that ability might be used to manipulate the story). Of *course* Captain Cosmos can lift that planetoid, *if* he can persuade or manipulate the gameplay into agreeing. Characters can be assembled in a "freeform" manner (choosing 12 abilities to share between categories), or by using use a modular creation system, or with a hybrid of those two methods. A character can be assembled in seconds, a fine feature for a game in which the plot is made up as play goes along.

Actual play is broken into a series of "scenes," "pages," and "actions." The player who starts the "scene" gets to establish the place and time where the action is going to occur. Each player then selects a character to play for the scene (and can buy additional characters with story tokens, about which more anon). Players are not obliged to play the same character for the whole game, or even from one scene to the next -- farewell to the traditional notion of playing a single character over the life of a campaign. You *can* keep to a single character, if you wish, and players can agree to leave certain characters in the sole custody of certain players.

The scene is broken into a series of "pages" -- think "rounds" and you're more or less on track. Each player can contribute a "conflict:" an "event" that will happen or a "goal" to challenge some character. These are jotted onto index cards and placed on the table where they can be seen and assessed with ease. Players then "claim" one side or another of a conflict and influence them with "actions." Actions have a rule component (how they work in the game) and a narration component (how it happens in the story). Conflicts are removed when they are "resolved:" no further actions have been applied to them and one side or other has advantage. Whoever controls the conflict at the end narrates how the conflict is resolved: The event happened, but maybe in an unexpected way. The character met the goal, or did not, or did in a peculiar way. Resources are shifted, pages continue until all the conflicts are resolved, and then the scene ends and a new scene begins.

Each character has three pools of resources to affect actions. Get "debt tokens" when you use your powers; these are assigned to one of your drives. When the debt on a given drive exceeds that drive's strength number, bad things can happen. Avoid bad things by spending debt tokens from drives as "stakes" onto a conflict (one which relates to the drive) to increase your chances of winning. *Win* the conflict (or rather, control the resolution of same) and you can

shed the debt tokens, turning them into story tokens with which to compensate the opposition. If your position fails, the debt comes back to that drive, doubled. Story tokens buy extra conflicts, actions or characters. Comparing the dice values of a resolved conflict determines who receives "inspirations," which are used later to increase a die's value without having to roll. Ah, there the dice are at last. They are used as markers to track the status of each side in a conflict, and players roll them, split them and reroll them as they commit resources into the scene.

In play **Capes** will resemble a board game more than a conventional roleplay game, as the actions progress around the table during each page and new conflicts are placed on the table, dice moved about, tokens shifted, and so on. In sensibility there are similarities to James Wallis's [Baron Munchausen](#) game, as you choose whether and when to utilize the tools at hand. The game also requires a serious engagement with telling the story. Some types of players may not be willing to offer the involvement **Capes** demands.

The first third of the book covers the rules and gives some detailed play examples. The examples will end up being your main guide in how to play. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss character creation, both in concept and with the modular "click and lock" system, in around 30 pages. The subsequent chapters, with extended rules, personalizing the rules, strategy and tactics, and preparing a story thread each run about 10 pages. A few appendices offer useful tips on naming characters, gadgets and magical items. Two pages of index close the book. In presentation, the typeface is comfortably large, and several graphical conventions (inline bullets for page references, for example) make it a comfortable browse. Simple line art pieces lead each chapter, and each "click and lock" module comes with a small evocative sketch. The art style tends more toward Japanese manga than towards American comics.

The "click and lock" modules deserve special praise. These are partial sets of character abilities, focusing on "Powers" (or "Skills" for the mundanes) and "Personas." Pick one of each module; they are designed to graphically interlock. Cross out three abilities and the character is done. This visual approach to character-making takes all the pain out of prefabricated templates, and the process of making new templates to your taste is both obvious and simple.

The book has no blank character sheet. The preface directs the reader to [the publisher's website](#), but as of this writing there are no plain blank sheets there. (To be fair, characters are so simple that a dedicated form isn't really necessary.) The site does, however, have several other useful tools. A "lite" preview adventure provides a simplified and structured introduction to the game. The Flash character generator and other online module tools should provide ample support for the compulsive paper-shuffler. An errata sheet is also available which corrects faults which might impede play but does not address the inevitable errors of usage and grammar.

The main weakness in the book is one of clarity. **Capes** introduces a raft of novel concepts which will be unfamiliar to both the regular hobby gamer and the new reader. While the author has used his graphical and textual tools to some good effect, there is no substitute for transparent organization and careful prose. As a result the game suffers from the traditional ailment of needing to be taught rather than just being read and learned. Using a smaller typeface and less white space might have made room for more naturally flowing text. Game rules are a special kind of storytelling and deserve extra care.

Capes is very obviously a personal labor of love on the part of the author/designer/artist. As such this game will tend to appeal most to those who share his view of storytelling games. The players willing to commit to the work should find that having no one (and everyone!) as game master brings a new richness of adventuring experiences. **Capes** is not a game for everyone, and it won't overturn the industry, but it's a welcome and flavorful addition to the hobby gaming menu.

--Bob Portnell

Merging Elements -- Proceed Cautiously

Less than 72 hours after writing my [previous column](#), where I bemoaned not having the ability to be a fan anymore, I found myself contradicting at least part of the sentiment therein: I got caught up on some of my comic reading.

Last week, *Infinite Crisis #1* was released. Having enjoyed the previous Big Event -- *Identity Crisis* -- and the book leading up to this one -- the aptly named *Countdown to Infinite Crisis* -- I decided I wanted to catch up, lest any of the buzz lose its luster from spoilers via the forums I frequent.

Unfortunately, this was not as straightforward as I was expecting. Within the first two or so pages, I quickly realized that I had no clue what was going on, and I would need to read the four miniseries that led into this event. Fortunately, I'd been buying all those. Midway through the first mini-series I realized I'd need to read the recent issues of the Superman titles and *Wonder Woman*. Fortunately, I had those, too.

(Aside to those who create miniseries: If you are *ever* tempted to interrupt a miniseries with additional comics that are required to make sense of the story, I will do unspellcheckable things to you. Consider yourselves warned.)

So, having read 28 comics -- that's over 600 pages of comics -- I was now ready to read the first issue of another comic series. Without giving any spoilers as to the contents of this first issue (which isn't too hard, since I'm not certain I understood everything that was going on), I was actually impressed by how the four miniseries fed into this one. When I first heard about the idea, I was fairly certain that at least one or two of them would be superfluous, with "Well, we're back at Square One" resolutions; this wasn't the case. (That's not to say you couldn't figure out what was going on without having read them . . . rather, that all four had direct consequences that would play major parts in the setup to *Infinite Crisis*.)

What does this have to do the price of dice in Nice?

Well, to quote Bill Cosby, "I told you that story so I could tell you this one."

A few weeks ago over on [Slashdot.org](#), I read the most riveting computer-crime-related account since *The Cuckoo's Egg*. I won't steal the thunder of the original [article](#), but to summarize:

Computer crackers¹ had figured out a way to unlock the smart card technology used by a satellite-television provider, and used this info to steal digital television. The company in question found itself limited by the technology of this smart card; since television satellite broadcasts are passive -- they broadcast data but can't receive it -- the company couldn't use the obvious means of thwarting this ("Hey, SMARTCARD24601, are you listed on my database of paying subscribers?" "Uhhh . . . no?" <click>).

However, they *could* force an update to continue decoding the broadcasts (which the crackers continued to add to their cards to have them continue working). After years of piracy, the company forced some updates in discrete parts which contained garbage -- garbage which was still necessary to decode the broadcasts. Eventually, after a number of these updates, the crackers realized that the seeming garbage was actually designed to fit together, forming code that would destroy pirated cards. The company activated this code on the week before the Super Bowl, which overwrote the first eight bytes of the write-once memory with "GAMEOVER."

(The original is much more riveting; go read it.)

Anyway, digital television and comic book miniseries worked in tandem to make me realize something: It's really cool to have parts of a whole fit together into a larger tapestry.

Within a game, it's possible to have pieces fit together in a number of ways. The most obvious is in the malevolent way in our second example above: "Okay; our corporate espionage contact, Mr. Johnson, has requested we acquire four piles of scrap metal from Disassembled Killer Robots, LLC. We have three of the piles sitting in our van, and

we're about to toss in the fourth pile. Waitaminute . . . it's humming . . ."

And, the beauty of this idea's iteration is that it's eminently portable; four enchanted coins gathered from throughout a dungeon might combine into Something Interesting, a gatekeeper and keymaster might get jiggy and unleash Gozer the Gozarian, and so on. ("Unleash a tornado?! There must have been a misunderstanding; see, the pieces of this Whether Machine combine to form a device that modifies probability . . .")

And the technique doesn't need to be flashy or explosive. For example, in an RPG campaign I ran, the players had found two sheets of thin parchment that looked like strange runes when looked at separately, but when placed atop each other, spelled out a secret message. (Yes, these were actual props, and the players needed to actually figure this out. Yes, I know some players don't like this.) As a bonus, evil technique, the flashy and mundane options can be combined . . . what if, when combined, the parchments spell out a secret message *and* transport the victims to another plane of reality?

Within the campaign as a meta-game technique, the parts of a whole can be used just like the miniseries, with interlocking campaigns leading into a larger story. In this way, the technique of parts-to-a-whole is really just another iteration of the technique from a [couple of weeks ago](#).

Of course, since the [dawn of time](#), games have almost always consisted of pieces. However, it can be fruitful to think of various interpretations of what those pieces *mean*.

Or, if you don't want to do that, then consider curling up with a good comic book instead.

--*Steven Marsh*

¹ Or "hackers," if you would prefer . . . as would I, if doing so wouldn't probably prompt a dozen e-mails from people taking me to task for this.

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Icosahedron Adventures

Archetypical Organizations: Kith of Steel

by Owen K.C. Stephens

While the **d20 System** fantasy rules provide numerous class for characters to choose from, the first choice players tend to make is what archetypical role they plan to fill. Most dungeon-stomping, orc-killing, treasure-seeking groups need a primary combatant (often broken into a front-line combatant and a ranged or mobile combatant), a cunning scout (master of traps and stealth), a healer (to fix them up again), and a spellcaster (who deals primarily in offensive and utilitarian spells, rather than healing). These roles are flexible and often some characters overlap (many healers are also spellcasters, while a shape-changing druid might serve as both a healer and a mobile combatant), but they show up so often (and the rules support their existence so well) that it's hard to deny the roles exist even if some characters stand halfway between two roles.

If such roles are commonplace, it stands to reason organizations would develop to support them. Some such groups are obvious (if most healers are priests, a church serves as a healer's organization), while others are less so, or turn out to be poor matches. For example, the over-common Thieves' Guild tends to focus on illegal activities for profit, while the cunning scout may well be an archeological explorer, a military tracker, or an ideological assassin. Similarly, warrior types are often gathered in armies or adventuring groups, but neither has the multi-national reach and influence of a church. If combatants are as common and as influential as priests, then surely they would have their own broad organization, in at least some game worlds.

The Archetypical Organization series of articles is designed to present wide-ranging organizations to support these common archetypes. Each has a single organization with the same reach and scope as a church, though most aren't religious in any real sense. The articles provide an overview of the organization, an idea of its goals and activities, and a few game rules designed to support the organization. A GM can drop these organizations into games to support the characters who choose the archetypes that make most typical **d20 System** games go smoothly.

Kith of Steel

In the capitol of any major kingdom across the lands can be found a simple, stoutly constructed building easily mistaken for a warehouse. In this structure no windows can be found within 10 feet of the ground, and those higher up are little more than archer slits. A single thick wall of brick or stone surrounds the building, with a set of heavy wooden double doors that grant admission to an open courtyard filled with stables, smithies, and practice yards. A steel shield hangs over the door, and no other markings can be found. But despite its simplicity, this building is well known by all local folk, for it is a chapterhouse of the Kith of Steel.

The Kith of Steel is a large network that serves as fighting schools, hiring houses and mutual support alliances for fighting men and women. Originally a mercenary company, the Kith has expanded well beyond its original purpose as a clearing house for sell-swords. It now serves as a guild for warriors of many nations, providing them with materials, equipment, security and contacts. The Kith also serves to give individual fighters a voice in national affairs. A baron may not care what a single caravan guard thinks of his new laws banning longswords, but he'll certainly listen to the thousands of members of the Kith. Anyone who can prove their worth in a fight is welcome to join, but only true warriors ever show much interest.

Although many nobles are cautious about the idea of an organization of independent warriors, several see it as a way to ensure that there are always well-trained, experienced warriors available whenever they are needed. The alternative is to have untrained peasants and merchantmen fighting off brigands, villagers pressed into armies instead of professional soldiers, and wizards fumbling with swords when their vaunted magics run short.

The Kith also boasts a great deal of support from the common man. In a world full of strange monsters and powerful magics, it is important for villagers and peasant folk to know someone is around to defend them. And common folk often identify more with the warriors of the Kith than spellcasters, monks, footpads, or barbarians who may seem alien and strange to ordinary men and women.

Organization

The Kith of Steel is broken into several chapters, each a semi-autonomous organization with names such as the Burning Swords or Steel Angels. Each chapter is based in a Chapterhouse found in a major city and run by a Marshall. Depending on the size of a chapter, and how many outposts it is affiliated with, a Marshall may have between one and three vice-Marshals to help run things. Smaller towns and villages may boast an Outpost, a smaller garrison of the local chapter, run by an Armiger (whose first duty is to see to the defense of the town).

Most members of a chapter of the Kith of Steel are simple legionnaires, warriors who have gained membership in the Kith and enjoy its protection and aid. Legionnaires are not vassals of the Kith obedient to its every edict. They are instead members of a fellowship, dedicated to providing mutual support for all their fellow warriors. Legionnaires are expected to honor their comrades and leaders within the Kith but are free to lead their own lives. Although legionnaires have an affiliation with a specific chapter, they retain some loyalty to the Kith as a whole. Anyone can become a legionnaire if he is sponsored by an existing member or convinces a Marshal to accept him.

Every kingdom in which the Kith operates has a Council of Steel, formed by the Marshals of each chapter within that kingdom. The Council is responsible for outlining the code that all legionnaires within that kingdom are expected to follow. Although this varies somewhat from region to region, there are some rules of conduct universal to all chapters of the Kith. All provide for the support, supply and protection of all members of the Kith, regardless of their chapter affiliation. Although legionnaires may sometimes cross swords with other members of the Kith, they are always expected to treat such colleagues with respect. And although the organization does not require strict adherence to any particular code of honor, any legionnaire making a promise in the name of the Kith shall be expected to observe it. Any legionnaire acting against the Kith of Steel itself will be hunted down.

Most small villages don't have any major presence of the Kith of Steel. However, some old legionnaires retire to run blacksmithing shops or taverns in these hamlets. Such shops are generally affiliated with an Outpost in a nearby town or city and have an old steel sword or gauntlet hanging outside their shop to proclaim that allegiance. The main function of these outposts is to provide message and intelligence services for the Kith as a whole and to keep an eye out for young people of all races who show a real talent for fighting. These youngsters are encouraged to seek out a chapterhouse in a larger city for more advanced training.

These shops offer friendly, honest service -- perhaps slightly discounted (10% off) to fellow Kith -- and the ability to send messages to Outposts and Chapterhouses in nearby towns and cities. Sometimes shops of this kind can be used as safe gathering places for legionnaires and their friends or serve as delivery points for special orders of equipment. A wounded or destitute warrior might receive some charity from such retired legionnaires but shouldn't count on it. Retired legionnaires often love to talk shop, and can provide newcomers to an area with the lay of the land from the professional warrior's point of view.

Most major towns have at least one Kith-affiliated business as described above, and many boast an actual Outpost (though possibly a small one). Outposts are not much more than a stout wall surrounding one large dirt floored room with a few storage rooms and perhaps an office. These are manned 24 hours a day and serve as cheap hostels, suppliers of simple merchandise and weapons and places for members to gather. They also serve as training houses for local boys with an interest in fighting and emergency safehouses for wounded or hunted legionnaires.

Outposts are generally on very good terms with the local town militia or guard and likely provide free training to locals once a week or so. The legionnaires who man such outposts are usually nearly retired or locals themselves. If the town is threatened by monsters or brigands, townsfolk can always count on the outpost as a place to take shelter. The Kith as a whole see their Outposts as a way to ensure they keep the trust of common folk.

The large city Chapterhouses serve as a great deal more than training centers and places to sleep. They provide a wide range of services for members, including scribes to read or write letters for illiterate legionnaires, smiths and leather workers to repair weapons and armor, suppliers of adventuring and combat gear and, in some cases, even healers from local temples. Members must pay for these services but can expect to receive a 20% discount off the local going rate.

Dealing with Outsiders

Although the Kith remains studiously neutral in most political affairs, many rulers find it difficult to believe that a large group of armed combatants have no intentions of making trouble. But the training and services provided by the Kith are simply too useful for most rulers to banish them entirely. And many kings either trained at a Kith outpost themselves when younger, or have trusted knights and guard captains who did so.

In most kingdoms, the Kith is tolerated by kings and wealthy nobles and welcomed by peasants and knight-barons from border territories. Laws are frequently passed restricting who the Kith can train and how many legionnaires can gather at once. But more than one kingdom has been saved from invaders by the combined heroics of a few hundred of these warriors, and this fact has not been lost on modern rulers. In general, as long as the Kith doesn't make trouble or become a safe house for brigands and murderers, local authorities are willing to leave them alone.

Officially the Kith of Steel neither resorts to the use of force in most of its political dealings, nor does it condone the use of force by others on its behalf. This is a political necessity, since the Kith needs some level of acceptance among nobles and kings who are otherwise unlikely to allow armed encampments of mercenaries on their doorstep. To bolster its claim of being a legitimate trade guild, the Kith does not officially condone violent solutions to political problems.

Officially.

Realistically, however, the Kith is made up of people who have been trained to fight and that's what they tend to be good at. Groups that oppose the Kith often end up dealing with difficulty arranging for caravan guards, mysterious fights breaking out in their favorite taverns, and occasionally attacks against their families and allies. Of course the Kith can't control the actions of individuals who supports its cause, and never sanctions such actions. But when a small army of 50 Kith "independently" decide to kill off a baron who has managed to place an embargo on a Kith of Steel chapter, other rulers get the message.

There are also two major exceptions to the Kith's policy of non-violent negotiation. First, once the Kith has permission to build a Chapterhouse or Outpost, they fight tooth and nail to keep it. It's not unusual for conquerors or new nobles to decide to get rid of the Kith, only to discover that such a thing is much easier said than done. The Kith protects its holdings by force and is capable of calling up large numbers of experienced warriors if pushed. Even if the building itself is destroyed, the Kith of Steel continues to keep a presence in the area -- clandestinely if necessary -- to provide support and protection to its members. Many novice rulers end up deciding it's better to allow the Kith to have a Chapterhouse in a known location than to deal with a dispersed underground organization.

The other exception concerns the treatment of legionnaires captured by government or mercenary forces. If the Kith receives reports of captured legionnaires being tortured, possessed, or summarily executed, it's likely to mean trouble for the offending group. The Kith is aware that its members occasionally engage in actions that are forbidden under local laws (such as trying to depose tyrants -- the tyrants rarely look fondly on such efforts) and won't start a war over comrades being tried and punished in a reasonable manner. But if the Kith receives reports of legionnaires being mistreated it's likely to take action. Simple warnings and demands for the legionnaires' release or ransom are likely to be tried first, but when those efforts are not successful the Kith mobilizes to free its own.

On those occasions that the Kith does resort to force it's likely to be a well-trained, well-equipped, but small group sent to accomplish a specific goal. In addition to several legionnaires, such a force usually includes at least one spellcaster friend to the Kith, a rogue with a dependable track record, and several clerics who are either on good terms with the Kith or on bad terms with the target of the attack. It's not unusual for bands of adventurers that include a few Kith members to be asked to perform operations of this type. Normally these attacks are simple search-and-rescue missions designed to retrieve captured legionnaires. If the prisoners are too well guarded for such an effort, or if

they've already been killed, a punitive strike against some other target may be arranged. The Kith always picks such targets very carefully and avoids any risk to innocent civilians.

Groups with no legal authority attacking the Kith soon discover that its official policy of non-violence when dealing with rulers and nobles does not apply to bandits, ruffians, and criminals. If one of these organizations takes on the Kith, the response is swift and very violent. Political necessity may protect kings and dukes, but it doesn't cover brigands.

The Kith keeps close ties with several similar organizations, as these organizations frequently contact the Kith to find warriors willing to aid in quests or willing to act as guards.

Benefits of Membership

Members of the Kith of Steel have several advantages over other warriors. First, their association with the Kith tends to encourage anyone who captures a legionnaire to treat the warrior in a fair manner. Second, the Kith maintains contacts with several other large organizations, through which a warrior can seek gainful employment or seek specialists to help him accomplish missions. A legionnaire in need of a sage to solve an ancient riddle, a priest to heal a festering wound or a rogue to help free captured comrades can enlist the aid of the Kith to find them.

Expert training is also available to members of the Kith. In campaigns where a GM requires a character to train before rising in levels or adding new heroic feats, such training is freely accessible to a legionnaire at any Kith chapterhouse. Non-fighter characters who wish to add a fighter level may also gain training through the Kith, although they are expected to pay for such services. Certain feats are only available to characters who train with the Kith (as detailed below).

Most mundane equipment is available at large Chapterhouses, with a 20% discount for legionnaires. Some independent merchants and smiths also offer members of the Kith discounted rates for equipment or services. In any city with a Chapterhouse, there's a 5% chance of any given shop offering such a discount. In smaller towns and areas further from Kith influence, there is but a 1% chance. In a campaign where magic items are bought and sold, the Kith are also able to arrange for such items to be created for their member (though the discount does not apply to custom-ordered magic). Wizards occasionally offer to make such items in return for assistance, and rogues sometimes find themselves in possession of armor or weapons they cannot use and would be willing to sell. The Kith remains alert to opportunities of this kind.

The Kith can act as a bank, message service, and storage facility for warriors who have no set home. The Kith of Steel charges nothing to members who wish to deposit sums of gold with the Kith that may then be withdrawn at any Kith Outpost. A message left at any Chapterhouse for a legionnaire eventually makes its way to the recipient, although that can take weeks or even months. Small amounts of material can be stored in a Chapterhouse by a member, although a charge may be levied for exceptionally bulky items or long-term storage.

Additionally, the Kith provides a safety net for down-on-their-luck warriors and those that have reached the end of their fighting careers. If a warrior is no longer able to make a living due to age, injury, or other ailment, it is usually possible for him to take a post with the Kith in return for food and board. Many smaller Kith Outposts have a few "old-timers" as permanent staff members to train the young and help with administration. Of course it is never safe to assume that even the most elderly of legionnaires is harmless, as a few young troublemakers inevitably discover from time to time.

But perhaps the greatest benefit offered by the Kith is its practice of arranging for the rescue of lost or captive members. A member's chance of being rescued depends on the availability of capable rescuers and the reputation of the lost Legionnaire. A few enthusiastic old salts are ready to go off and rescue a comrade at the drop of a helm. Most members are, however, understandably reluctant to risk their own necks for the safety of fellows who have yet to contribute significantly to the group.

Duties of Membership

A member of the Kith of Steel is expected to pay dues annually and provide service for the Kith periodically. Normal legionnaires are expected to put 100 gp a year into the Kith's coffers, although this can be either a lump sum or a series of irregular payments. Legionnaires do get behind on payments, and that's normally overlooked if it happens infrequently and only when the legionnaire is obviously on hard times. A fighter who does so regularly or while wearing expensive new clothes is likely to find himself having a "conversation" with several members of the Kith. Eventually he'll be informed he must pay up immediately or lose legionnaire status.

Legionnaires also are expected to give some of their time and talents to the Kith. Most legionnaires spend a few days every two months manning a Kith outpost. Legionnaires whose schedules are too erratic for such duty are often asked to perform other tasks for the Kith, such as delivering messages, providing guard duty for friends of the kith, or even showing up as muscle during Kith negotiations with potential enemies.

Occasionally it's simply not practical for a member to spend time working on Kith problems, such as a King's bodyguard or a noble or has full time duties of his own. In these cases, it is often permissible for the legionnaire to pay additional monthly dues in lieu of service. These dues can vary some depending on the wealth of the member but tend to be about 50 gp/month.

Contacts

Any legionnaire can get a message to the Kith eventually, but most people dealing with the Kith seek out a Marshal or a merchantman associated with the Kith. Two such characters have been detailed below.

Thurfir Strongarm (F4 Human, Str 16, Dex 10, Int 13, Wis 11, Con 15, Chr 9)

Thurfir is a retired legionnaire turned blacksmith and armorer. A gruff and imposing man, Thurfir is usually found working at his forge or instructing up to a dozen apprentices in his shop. He is a proud and capable man, but an old leg wound ended his career as an adventurer many years ago. The wound still bothers Thurfir occasionally, but he'll never admit it or accept assistance with it.

Although his shop, the Crossed Blades, is primarily a source of quality metal goods for local townsfolk, it is also a popular source of weapons and armor for warriors who have dealt with Thurfir in the past. Thurfir remains in close contact with the Burning Sword chapter of the Kith and keeps a steel gauntlet nailed up above his shop sign to declare his allegiance. The shop is also a good place for Legionnaires to hold meetings, receive messages and order equipment.

Members of the Kith of Steel find themselves very welcome in Thurfir's shop and treated like siblings. He gives a 20% discount to such comrades-in-arms and extends a 10% discount to a legionnaire's friends and companions. Thurfir also places any special equipment a legionnaire orders from him at the top of his priorities, usually cutting 10-20% off the time it takes to make or procure.

As a member of the Kith, Thurfir also occasionally sponsors a new legionnaire into the brotherhood. Only individuals who seem to be stout and fair warriors are likely to gain Thurfir's approval in this way, but any who are consistent about desiring membership are likely to at least be referred to the Burning Sword chapterhouse, where they can discuss their desires with Irialle Galanodel, the local Marshal.

Thurfir sends regular messages to Marshal Irialle, commander of the Burning Sword chapterhouse and an old friend. His reports keep her updated on local events, and his opinions carry a great deal of weight with her. Although Thurfir does not have many contacts of his own outside of town, he often forwards any requests legionnaires make to Irialle, who sends him a response in a week or two. In case of an emergency Thurfir can arrange for a runner to get word to the chapterhouse and back in just a few days, or could write a letter to send with a legionnaire to take to Irialle directly.

Irialle Galanodel, Marshal of the Burning Swords chapter of the Kith of Steel (F9/W2, ½Elf, Str 13, Dex 15, Int 12, Wis 11, Con 10, Chr 15)

Irialle is an accomplished half-elven warrior and the commander of a major Kith outpost located near the center of a major city. She is a sophisticated fighter who believes self confidence and a good reputation are among a warrior's best weapons. She also believes that some offenses are too severe to be met with anything but force and that some situations unquestionably call for violence.

Like many of her kind, Irialle left her elven family in an effort to find a place for herself among human society. Originally trained as a wizard, she soon found the romance of swordplay more to her liking. Irialle sought training with the Burning Swords and has been loyal to the Kith ever since. A few years ago the old Marshal of the Burning Swords retired, and Irialle took the post as her own.

Irialle takes a very hands-on approach to running the chapterhouse. She teaches a class of young hopeful fighters once a month and occasionally takes on one or two more advanced students for individual lessons. She knows every legionnaire who visits the chapterhouse regularly and makes it a point to meet new ones passing through. Irialle is very protective of "her" legionnaires and has been known to go to great lengths to find or rescue any that go missing. As a result, most legionnaires would march through hell at her request.

A legionnaire can depend on Irialle to provide food and shelter at reasonable rates at the chapterhouse and to help arrange for local services (such as healing, scribes, sages and smiths), usually with a discount from the normal cost of such labor or material. She's also available for simple advice, ranging from how large a group needs to be to survive exploring a particular dungeon to good fashion sense.

Irialle also handles most requests for assistance or special help personally. Irialle believes in working in groups and employing specialists as needed and often recommends the hiring of individuals with magical or social talents in addition to simple fighters. She has a broad network of contacts within the local guard and merchant houses. She also knows a number of people in other large organizations, though she tends to avoid arcane spellcasters as unpleasant reminders of her years trying to master wizardry.

Adventure

The Kith of Steel can serve as an excellent starting point for a ***d20 System*** fantasy adventure. In a new campaign, characters might find themselves sought out by the Kith to assist a young legionnaire with a hazardous mission requiring many different skills. Or a character might be a member of the Kith himself, sent to gather a group together to help the Kith accomplish some goal. There are always merchants and noblemen who ask the Kith to find trustworthy guards for traveling treasures or adventurers to clear out an abandoned castle. The Kith's broad reach allows it to be used as a way to gather characters from very different backgrounds.

In ongoing campaigns a member of the Kith could be asked to put together a team to rescue a fellow legionnaire held by brigands or an evil necromancer. A Kith Outpost can make a good base of operation for a group either adventuring in nearby uncharted wilderness or involved in city matters on a regular basis. When a new character is introduced, he could be brought in as an expert located by the Kith to aid an existing band of characters.

New Feats

Certain feats are widely identified with the Kith of Steel, which is the best place to learn them. As a general rule any particular Chapterhouse has trainers for 2-5 of these Feats. Outposts are much less focused on special training, and there is a 50% chance of finding someone able to teach 1-3 of these Feats.

From a game rules point of view, all of these feats can be treated as having "Kith of Steel training" as a prerequisite. The feats are balanced without this additional limitation, but making them exclusive to Kith legionnaires helps bring flavor and function to that organization.

Ferocious Assault [General]

You are capable of attacking with fierce dedication.

Prerequisite: Str 13+, Power Attack

Benefit: A character with Ferocious Assault may take a -4 penalty to their AC at the beginning of their round to gain a +2 to all attack rolls made that round. The AC penalty lasts until the character's next round.

Special: A fighter may take this feat as one of his fighter bonus feats.

Improved Dodge [General]

You are particularly adept at avoiding blows.

Prerequisite: Dex 13; Dodge; Base Attack +8 or higher

Benefit: You may designate a single foe at the beginning of your round, and receive a +2 dodge bonus to AC against attacks that foe makes. Alternatively, you may gain a +1 dodge bonus to AC against all attacks from any source. In either case, the dodge bonus replaces the bonus gained with the Dodge feat.

Special: A fighter may take this feat as one of his fighter bonus feats.

Pin [General]

You are particularly adept at blocking other's weapons with your own.

Prerequisite: Combat Expertise

Benefit: As a melee attack, you may attempt to Pin one weapon of an opponent. To attempt to Pin, both you and your target roll opposed attack rolls. If the weapons are of different size, the character with the larger weapon gains a +4 bonus to his attack roll per difference in Size category. If you beat the defender, his weapon is pinned by your own and neither can be used to make additional attacks as long as you maintain the Pin (requiring an attack action each round). If you fail, you provoke an attack of opportunity from the defender.

To free a pinned weapon, a defender must either take an attack action to attempt to free it (making another opposed attack roll), or must withdraw out of your threatened area. The defender can also leave the weapon pinned, or simply drop it.

Special: A fighter may take this feat as one of his fighter bonus feats.

Pressing Attack [General]

You are able to force foes back with a flurry of blows.

Prerequisite: +6 base attack, Dodge, Power Attack

Benefit: If you make a full attack action against a single foe in melee, you force that foe to make a Reflex save (DC 10 + your base attack bonus + your Str modifier). For each size category larger than your foe is, he gains a +4 modifier, for each size smaller a -4 penalty. If the foe fails this save, you force him to move 5 feet directly away from you. You may choose to make a 5-foot step to stay adjacent to your foe. This movement counts against the next round movement for both of you.

Special: A fighter may take this feat as one of his fighter bonus feats.

Shieldbearer [General]

You have been trained to use a shield to help protect others.

Prerequisite: Shield Proficiency

Benefit: If wearing a shield you can help protect a friend against the attacks of one target attacking him. If in position to block for your friend, you may make an attack against an AC of 10. If successful, you may grant your friend +4 AC vs attacks from that target. If you take a full attack action, you need use only one attack to block with your shield.

Normal: A character without Shieldbearer can use the Aid Another special combat action to help a friend.

Special: A fighter may take this feat as one of his fighter bonus feats.

Pyramid Review

MidEvil

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Conceived & Designed by Kerry Breitenstein & Todd A. Breitenstein

Art by Dave Aikins, Jeremy McHugh, Paul (Prof.) Herbert, & Ed Bouelle

Layout by Todd Breitenstein

100 plastic Skeletons in three colors, 50 gray plastic Humans, six player pawns, 30 map tiles, 50 event cards, two dice, & rule booklet; \$24.99

Just because you killed the walking dead in the present and put paid to the zombie dog invasion doesn't mean you're done fighting evil. In **MidEvil**, the next episode in Twilight Creations' line of variable tile system games, you're thrust into the distant past and forced to fight your way to the magic book that will whisk you home.

The game can be won two ways: be the first to kill 30 points worth of Skeletons, or bring the Necronomicon to the center of the Altar tile.

Play of the game is nearly identical to [Zombies!!!](#). The small hamlet is laid out one tile at a time, and you travel about dusting Skeletons and stealing their weapons. Some of the buildings also house Life Tokens, gray plastic human figures that represent your well-being in the game. Event cards throw twists into the action, and though the monsters move slowly, their superior numbers may surround you. Somewhere in the tile deck is the Graveyard; if you get the dreaded Necronomicon here and make it back to the Altar where you started, you can escape the hordes.

The differences? Components, most notably. The tiny cardboard counters that tracked life points are now full-size Human tokens, which are much easier to pick up. There's no ammunition (this is the Middle Ages); you improve your attacks by trading in Skeletons you've already killed. Since Skeleton collection forms one victory condition, you have to be judicious in trading them in.

The Skeletons come in three colors and three concomitant point values, but expending a "trophy" in combat only improves your total by one. Killing three-pointers gets you closer to victory, but if you've killed no one-pointers you'll have to spend the three-pointers to stay alive at a critical moment. Some event cards also require paying out Skeletons, sometimes a specific color, so a whole new tier of thinking is built into the system.

Unlike **Zombies!!!**, the winning conditions don't bend over to level the playing field. The Graveyard can show up at any time, making you race for the Necronomicon. Once obtained it still has to reach the altar, and characters are allowed to attack one another to steal the book. Combatants roll a die apiece and may add Skeletons to their total. The loser perishes and returns to the starting point: the altar, where the victor has to take the book.

There's fault aplenty in the minus column. Most trivial is atmosphere. **Zombies!!!** effectively conveyed a modern walking-dead outbreak, but MidEvil . . . You're contemporary people in the past, and while several event cards depict anachronistic stashes of guns and more, only one such card -- Explosives -- really suggests the fish-out-of-water gimmick. (Well, okay, there are two copies of that card, but just try to find the ideal circumstance to use it to proper effect.) If you're going to riff on *The Evil Dead*, you owe your audience at least one shotgun or a chainsaw.

Getting equipment isn't tough (though most requires killing a Skeleton first). Every card save the Necronomicon has at least one duplicate in the deck, so the spread of cards, cool or otherwise, is limited. That's a good thing for the Horse . . . these four (!) cards are coveted. Speed is possible -- and necessary -- in ways it never was in **Zombies!!!** because the book's appearance is unpredictable, and anyone without it has to ramp up the monster-killing in the endgame. **MidEvil** works better with more than two players; you get more action and the targets are thinned. With two participants, pockets of victory form and wait to be exploited. But worst of all are the event cards. Like the Skeletons, arguments over them are legion. Almost every one produces a question, and the rules lawyers will leave them in tatters.

Speaking of duplication, the playing tiles see a lot of repetition, too. There are no fewer than five inns . . . with all the visitors they're expecting, you must be adventuring in downtown Constantinople or something. It's all background, so it's not like it interferes with the game, but it smacks of truncated creativity.

The colors are a problem. The Humans (life tokens) (which are referred to repeatedly just that way -- Humans (life tokens) -- in case you forget) are the same mold as the players' pawns. You'll move a life token by accident several times. The white player's piece isn't far removed in hue from gray, either, and that doesn't address blending exactly, color-wise, with the white Skeleton pieces. Red and blue players have the same problem. And finally, once open the contents don't fit back in the box.

The artwork is decent stuff. It seems a little less well-defined than previous iterations. Concessions seem to have been made to the game's humorous bent (or to the humor of the movie genre it's based on, anyway), but at least it's the lively, mood-setting stuff the game needs.

All this sounds worse than it is . . . almost. The game really needed another round of playtesting, or at least a rules addendum for card clarifications. But the Skeleton point system is so simple, so workable, so smart, it's easy to overlook some of the game's other sins. **MidEvil** respects its audience enough to give them something new (and worthy) for their buck and not just another glossed-over reissue of the same old dead things.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

The Pastores: A Malefic Cult (for *Cthulhu Dark Ages*)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written & Illustrated by Thomas B. de Mayo

Cartography by Michael Patty

80-page tapebound b&w softcover; \$18

So the question is, "What is going on with *Cthulhu Dark Ages*?" Even when in print, the much-vaunted, much-delayed translation and adaptation of the German supplement from Pegasus Spiele GmbH has yet to receive any proper support from Chaosium. This is something of a problem, because [Cthulhu Dark Ages](#) is far from perfect. At the very least it needs advice for the Keeper of Secrets, in particular on running the game in *Call of Cthulhu's* traditional campaign format. Single scenarios have appeared in magazines, but no campaign has yet appeared, except now in monograph format. Chaosium's monographs showcase items that the publisher believes to be of interest and note to the game's devotees, (and you have to be a devotee as Chaosium only makes them available from its website) usually from the Miskatonic University Library Association.

Monographs for *Cthulhu Dark Ages* differ in that they are released under the auspices of the "Order of the Sword of St. Jerome." Described in the earlier monograph *The Abbey*, this Order is dedicated to routing out and overcoming the darkness that threatens Christendom as the final years of the first millennium approach. The Order, based in the French Alps, is aware of one such threat in south central France, known as the Pastores. The second monograph released by the Order of the Sword of St. Jerome, *The Pastores: A Malefic Cult for Cthulhu Dark Ages*, gives a full description as well as presenting a five part mini-campaign devoted to investigating and thwarting the cult. Found nearly nationwide (and beyond), the cult predates both the Roman and Celtic control of western France. Its fortunes have ebbed and flowed over the course of recorded history, but more recently the cult has been taking advantage of the political turbulence across France to spread its influence and both expand and solidify its power base, reaching into Spain and across the English Channel.

Just as the Romans assimilated the gods and faiths of those it conquered, the Pastores (or shepherds) have embraced Christian litany and theology to hide its true beliefs and practices. In reality the three families at the heart of the Pastores are an unknowing Cthulhu Mythos Cult, worshippers of the Magna Mater and her sacrificed son. Besides unknowingly worshipping Shub-Niggurath in her form of the Magna Mater and several Mythos beings in the form of her son -- including Nyarlathotep, Yig, and Tsathoggua -- the cult's practices include the breeding, transformation, and occasional sacrifice of those under its rule. The three families also practice self-transformation; cult members sacrifice themselves to the Arbores (which are of course Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath) in a process that can result in the creation of a new life form, while other transformations can alter features and extend life. Such sacrifices usually come at the end of an orgiastic rite. The plans of the Pastores involve protecting their current holdings as well as proselytizing the cult faith across France.

The most prominent of these holdings is the fictional county of Begon, north of Toulouse; there, a member of the cult has been appointed its Bishop. Besides the monasteries and convents under its sway, the cult has a number of allies more knowledgeable about the Mythos. These include a pair of Serpent Men and a sorcerous coven lead by a Hyperborean wizard. As long as such allies accept the wisdom of the Pastores, the cult is happy to make use of their capabilities.

As a cult and an insidious threat, the Pastores is well presented. In addition the author explores possible connections

leading away from the Pastores. These include H.P. Lovecraft's short story "The Rats in the Walls" and the dark secrets of Exham Priory, as well as to [Delta Green: Countdown](#) via the Skoptsi, and to the works of Ramsey Campbell and Robert M. Price. Notably, Magna Mater worship lies at the heart of "Morituri Te Salutamus," one of two scenarios in the earlier monograph, [Cthulhu Invictus: Horror Role-Playing In Ancient Rome](#).

The investigators have the chance to face the cult in the five-part mini-campaign, which works in the classic onionskin fashion. Both cult and campaign have been designed so that it can be located and run anywhere in southern Europe or perhaps somewhere more historical than the fictional Begon county. It can also be used with or without the Order of St Jerome; if used, the Order can serve as either an ally, a patron, or a possible hindrance. Information on both the Order and France in the 10th century can be found in *The Abbey*. Also useful for running the campaign are [The Keeper's Companion](#) and *The Creature Companion*, but neither are essential.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

To get the campaign started, three possible patrons are given and discussed; any one of them could be willing to ask the player characters to find a missing messenger in "The Tree With White Fruit." Set in early 962, the party's search must be made along difficult roads hampered by a hotheaded companion and the threat of banditry. When discovered, the current resting place of the messenger will reveal the worship of a pagan idol and suggestions of further secrets. This first scenario is not overly challenging, best suited to inexperienced characters, though the Keeper could easily toughen it up. In "Sleipnir," the second scenario, the investigators are witness to the cult's military might, both ordinary and outré as an allied noble tries to escape the cult's patronage. This exposure also reveals the characters as a threat to the Pastores, who assign an ally to kill them in "The Hunt." If the investigators can survive this, their patron asks them to contact a potential ally in the fourth part, "The Singing Flesh Beasts of St. Simon." Assigned to an isolated monastery, the ally seems to be an all too willing participant in the strange atmosphere found there. This scenario suggests to the investigators how deep the cult's influence reaches, with more revealed in the last scenario "Begon." What starts as an extraction mission results in the party's capture and torture before they might be able to get away with the information that might spur the authorities to act against the Pastores.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Overall, this is a reasonable mini-campaign, showcasing how a *Cthulhu Dark Ages* campaign can work. Yet it does feel all too short, and in need of expanding . . . not just of the sections dealing with Begon, but also North to Normandy and into Anglo-Saxon England to Exham Priory. Exham Priory is especially missed, since it's taken from the short story "The Rats in the Walls" and is a major influence. This is a decent snapshot of the cult, one that hints at much more. Further the end of the cult in Begon County is only slightly touched on, and nor does it really involve the investigators. Of course, all this and more could easily be addressed in a properly published and distributed edition. But considering that has yet to happen with any monograph released to date, how likely a possibility this is, only time and Chaosium can tell.

Physically, *The Pastores* is decently presented for a monograph. The writing is clear and the maps are nicely done, although there is no map of Begon County and its surrounding areas. It is illustrated, though only in an amateur style. This is not to say that the artwork is bad, more that it possesses a charm reminiscent of children's television animation - imagine [Noggin the Nog](#) meets the Mythos.

As the first campaign for *Cthulhu Dark Ages* this monograph proves that such a campaign is possible, serving to take the setting beyond the format of both the single scenario and the single threat. Thus it goes some way to fill a void that Chaosium has so far left empty. Despite needing expanding, or at least a sequel to follow up on its loose ends, *The Pastores: A Malefic Cult for Cthulhu Dark Ages* is the kind of support that *Cthulhu Dark Ages* should be getting.

--Matthew Pook

Hand of Clio's Nightmares

*"And in the fountain shall we gaze so long
Till the fresh taste be taken from that clearness,
And made a brine-pit with our bitter tears?
Or shall we cut away our hands, like thine?
Or shall we bite our tongues, and in dumb shows
Pass the remainder of our hateful days?
What shall we do? Let us, that have our tongues,
Plot some device of further misery,
To make us wonder'd at in time to come."
-- William Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, III:i:132-140*

Once more, it's [Halloween time](#), when the hinges of events creak and sway in the cold winds of horror. Clio, the Muse of History, starts at every groan and click, checking the gates and the doorways obsessively. Tonight, she dreads the feel of cold fingers around her throat, the skittering of dead mens' nails against the windows, the sight of a bloody palm-print on the door sill. The moving finger writes, they say, and moves on -- but sometimes, the hand of time comes back . . .

"[Christopher Lee] will make [his] debut in the film as leader of the Dark Side. . . . He will be using a light saber in the shape of 'The Sword of Charlemagne,' his ancestors' sword. Coincidence or not, this saber will be at home in the experienced hands of Mr Lee"
-- "Admin," posting on Christopher Lee's website (Jan 7 2002)

959 A.D. It is a dark time for the Rebel Alliance. The forces of the undying Emperor Heinrich of Palatine are everywhere on the march. He has converted the Byzantine Trade Federation to his evil cult, and infused his venom into their cunning daimones and homonculi. The imperial Storm-Riders in their eerie bone-colored armor spread across Germany, subduing the independent barons, the hairy Wodewoses, the wise dwarves, and every elf or land-spirit of a thousand forests and rivers. The center of the resistance is Liudolf, trained in the lost arts of the ancient and holy Paladin Order, founded by Charlemagne decades ago in the time of the Old Confederation. Six years ago, he successfully rescued the Princess Adeleia from the hidden Astrum Mortis fortress at Ivrea, which he destroyed using the *fortis* granted by paladin training. But he did not manage to kill Ottokin, the Dark Paladin who serves as the Emperor's occult enforcer. Worse, this year Ottokin managed to trap Liudolf on the sky-city of Magonia, where he cut off Liudolf's hand in single combat with flaming swords. The subtle arts of the Byzantine doctors have grown Liudolf a new one, composed of mandrake flesh and whippoorwill bones -- but now, Liudolf finds himself ever more attracted to the dark powers of the *fortis* espoused by Ottokin -- his father.

This **GURPS Fantasy** setting is *almost* historical, although Himmler's patron saint Heinrich the Fowler makes a better Evil Emperor than Otto I, and the Magyar invasions would just confuse things, so I've diverted them. In their place, we have a veritable galaxy of dark fantasy, in which all magic except the pure paladin arts must partake of the demonic. (Perhaps one or two good golems might exist, built by rabbis from golden brass or lacquered ivory.) The GM can tune it toward dark, personal struggles against the temptations of the dark side, emphasize the overwhelming hordes of evil rebuilding the Astrum Mortis atop the Brenner Pass, or play up the dark fantasy *Black Company* style with military grimness alongside epic swordplay, holy visions, and sundry phantom menaces.

"John Sykes was close to Nelson on his left hand and he seemed more concerned with the Admiral's life than with his own . . . It was cut, thrust, fire and no load again -- we had no time for that. The Spaniards fought like devils . . . they appeared to know him and directed their particalar attack towards the officers. Twice Sykes saved him; and now he saw a blow descending that would have severed the head of Nelson. . . . He saw the danger; that moment expired and Nelson would have been a corpse: but Sykes saved him -- he interposed his own hand! We all saw it . . . and we gave in revenge one cheer and one tremendous rally. Eighteen of the Spaniards were killed and we boarded and carried her: there being not one man left on board who was not either dead or wounded."

-- from an eyewitness description of the Battle of Cadiz (1797)

Nobody listened, much, when rumors accused the French revolutionaries of burning the Crown of Thorns when they desecrated Sainte-Chapelle in 1792. Perhaps they should, because things that Crown had kept pinned down began to rise up. When Commodore Nelson lost a hand (and the ship's chronometer) to a kraken off Spain, the Admiralty took notice. Nelson, now sporting a hook, managed to harry Napoleon out of Egypt, but the canny Bonaparte eluded him near the island of Paxi in the Aegean. What Bonaparte learned in the Pyramids helped him summon up the ever-young horned god of that island, and the Revolution gained a great and powerful ally. The vines and trees whispered the mad propaganda of freedom and license across Europe, and tiny fairies no larger than a tinker's bell listened to secret conversations from London to St. Petersburg, and spread their golden dust where it would do the most good. Admiral Nelson leads the fight for reason and order on the sea, just as Prime Minister Pitt and Chancellor of the Exchequer Darling do in Whitehall, but when all nature has gone mad, what is to be done? The kraken now follows Nelson wherever he goes, leading the French and Spanish to him and making secrecy impossible. Perhaps a picked crew of heroes and scholars can penetrate the Mediterranean under Nelson's command, and seek out the island of Oupote, home to the fearsome, unaging lord of madness, the father of all the wild gods, Pater Pan.

This ***GURPS Age of Napoleon-Faeries*** crossover pits the British against a Napoleon suborned by the ancient god Pan, with strong overtones of Shub-Niggurath and similar "unholy nature" elementals. Think of Aubrey and Maturin in *The Birds* or Hornblower battling Deep Ones for other touchstones, but the main themes are order vs. chaos, technology vs. magic, and the tamed nature of oak ships and lead shot vs. the wild forces of the bestial world.

"It was their hands that built this city of ours, Father. But where do the hands belong in your scheme? In their proper place, the depths."

-- Freder and Joh Fredersen, *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927)

Heil Fredersen! All glory to the genius who single-handedly turned the tide of the War 10 years ago, in 1917! His brilliant tactics, and coldly efficient restructuring of the German economy, reversed the course of the war in the West before the Americans could land in force. With the fall of the Russian Empire, he was able to bring new armies of Slav workers into the Reich, to toil in the vast arms factories he caused to be built. His icy commitment to scientific progress put wonder-weapons in the air and undersea, forcing a peace on all Europe. When he replaced the Kaiser in a technocratic putsch in 1923, it seemed only logical to the people of Germany. Now, he is the master of Europe, ruling from the new Berlin, a glorious expression of all that is rational and pure.

Unbeknownst to most, however, Fredersen's new Berlin -- and indeed, many of the devices that first won his victories -- came from the mind of the scientist Dr. Rotwang. He invented the new explosives that destroyed whole Allied armies and fortresses, and the miraculous super-metal armor allowed the German soldier to shrug off machine guns and charge through no-man's land. He created the War-Wing, the Auto-Jet, and the Crystal-Shark, and the civilian successors that ply the skies, autobahns, and seas of Germany's empire. Rotwang is content to work out of sight, hiding away in tunnels and laboratories scattered across and beneath the metropolis of Berlin. Here, he has limitless access to metals, electricity, and chemicals -- and to Russian slave labor -- by the secret order of Fredersen. But Dr. Rotwang has a secret, too.

His right hand is mechanical, artificial, built after an accident in 1917 that also killed his wife, Hel. He does not miss his human hand much. In fact, it was only after he lost his hand that he gained his brilliant ideas, concepts so radical that it has taken him ten years to begin to realize them. In that time he has built many new hands, each more powerful and versatile than the last, all in the quest to create life and intelligence from steel and acids. He has sacrificed his sanity -- and countless slaves -- in his search for the secrets he glimpsed a decade ago, and he no longer knows how many hands he has built, or where they all are. Which is just how they wanted it.

The hands of Rotwang have awakened; they are an emergent hive intelligence that has burrowed into every circuit, every relay, every cog and wheel and telescreen in all of Berlin. Some hide in plain sight, in hospitals or on the wrists of veterans. Others lurk in conduits and elevator shafts, wired into the city and watching key junctions. From the ivory towers of the Master's Office to the seedy warrens of Yoshiwara (Berlin's newest district, dominated by gangsters from Germany's new ally Japan), they have tools or clients who get written or teletype messages and follow instructions

loyally. The hands have driven Rotwang mad, and use the wires in his wrist to control his mind, driving him to build devices to their specifications. Only Rotwang's obsession with recreating his wife Hel is outside their control, but they have used his dream of a gynroid to add robotized parts to almost all the vehicles and devices in the city -- and Germany exports more and more such vehicles and devices all across the world now.

This ***GURPS Cliffhangers-Cyberpunk*** frame presents any number of possibilities for PCs, from "street-level" punks, to Underground City Bolshevik-Christian activists among the slaves, to human gangsters threatened by the Hands' increasing control of the city, to scientists and engineers increasingly disillusioned by Frederesen's brave new world. You can add "dream running" adventures (surely Rotwang has dramatically improved Hans Berger's EEG, invented in 1920), telepathy, Moloch-worshiping vampires, or anything else that seems apropos, creepy, and Expressionist. Whatever the direction, the feel is paranoia and unfolding horror -- there are three layers of secrets between the average Hollerith hacker and the insidious hands of Dr. Rotwang.

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Alaba The Serpent-Priestess

for *Nyambe* and *GURPS*

by Phil Masters

The woman known as Alaba was born the daughter of a minor merchant family in a fair-sized provincial town. A selfish, mean-spirited child, she mastered the trick of slipping away onto the streets of the town whenever her parents tried to deal with her bad behavior, making it impossible for them to keep her under any sort of control. However, while out of the house at such a time, she caught the eye of another adult, a nondescript, shabby wanderer, who saw some potential in the girl.

Unfortunately, this wanderer was a secret devotee of the dark power of Zombi the Serpent Lord. Alaba liked the idea of having more power than anyone who tried to control her, and studied the subject with enthusiasm, soon becoming an acolyte of the cult.

Her parents, thinking that her occasional disappearances and long hours spent alone were still merely signs of childish rebelliousness, were if anything relieved as she seemed to become less obviously wild, when in fact she was simply becoming more adept in the ways of secrecy. Shortly before she reached full adulthood, though, her father died of an entirely natural disease, and her mother resolved to marry the girl off before returning to her own family in a remote part of the countryside. Alaba sulked and pouted, but had no choice but to marry the middle-aged trader who her mother found for her.

Unfortunately for that trader, Alaba was by now a full priestess of the Serpent Lord, with a small but devoted secret congregation. While not especially capable, some of these followers were more than willing to serve her in any way they could, and Alaba gained access to assorted resources through them and her husband's money. And so it was that, while he was away on a trading trip, her husband fell ill and died of a sudden, rather unpleasant sickness.

Perhaps a few people suspected poison, and it was no secret that Alaba had no real love for her husband, but she was miles away, no one known to be connected with her was on the scene when her husband took ill, there was no evidence of witchcraft, and she showed some proper token signs of grief. Hence, anyone who might have ferreted out the truth shrugged, and Alaba settled down to the life of a merchant-widow, employing a fairly competent steward (actually one of the cult) to handle business matters. Over time, her shrewder neighbors noticed that her lack of commercial acumen was balanced by the small group of friends she acquired throughout the town, but this was merely seen as a matter of cleverness on her part.

Fairly recently, the dark power she worships granted Alaba the ability to reanimate the dead, and she has taken to this with enthusiasm, both to promote the cult and to further her personal ends. The latter may be her downfall, as a compulsive urge for revenge occasionally leads her to make mistakes. Still, her followers have managed to acquire her enough good bodies to reanimate without attracting any serious attention. Other Zombi cults in other towns are beginning to respect her accomplishments; one rewarded her (or sought to curry favor with her) by gifting her with an enchanted blade for use in sacrifices and in battle.

She has also long been working to establish connections with the merchants and leading figures of her home town, but few if any of them are really interested in taking up the worship of death and evil; at most, they're just ordinarily selfish, and willing to flirt with the messengers of this secretive power in the community in exchange for favors and petty advantages. But Alaba is far from stupid; before she lets anyone near finding out her identity, she makes sure that they're compromised enough that giving her away would mean signing their own death warrants. Still, if any of them annoyed her, she might send an undead assassin to deal with them, which would draw the presence and strength of her cult to the attention of the mass of the population and of the rulers.

Looking ahead, Alaba dreams of advancing into the higher mysteries of the Serpent Lord, which would give her more

refined powers. (In **Nyambe** game terms, she wants to gain levels in the Zombi Cultist Prestige Class; in **GURPS**, advanced initiation could give her some new advantages with the Pact limitation.) The snag is, the price of such power is that she'd have to slay someone she loves in order to reanimate them as undead -- and Alaba isn't entirely sure that there's anyone in the world who qualifies for this purpose. She finds this irritating.

(Of course, it's just possible that, say, a high-minded PC might get to know her without learning the full depth of her depravities, and might even try to use the power of love to persuade her to abandon the dark interests and savage inclinations which become obvious to everyone close to her. This could be very unfortunate for the high-minded lover.)

Alaba in Play

Alaba is, frankly, a minor but dangerous evil priestess in the classic pulpish mode. She is fully capable of crying out "Slay these interlopers, my undead minions!" with a completely straight face, and indeed *should* do so eventually, while pointing at a group of PCs with a look of primal rage disfiguring her face.

That said, she's a serious opponent for a low-to-middle level campaign, and PCs who fail to take her seriously enough should have a good chance of ending up as prey to the undead -- or, quite possibly, of joining her lurching minions. Exactly how formidable she is will depend as much as anything on the size and competence of the cult she's managed to acquire, and on the power of her undead "bodyguard"; remember, though, that if any of the latter are destroyed, but Alaba survives, she can always make more. Indeed, so long as she remains out of sight herself, she will tend to regard her undead as disposable weapons, to be hurled in waves at interfering heroes while she slips away from the scene. (She actually sees her living cultist minions much the same way, of course, but they're harder to replace.) Plots can revolve around her attempts to acquire bodies of superior quality to raise as further servants when she's expended a few too many undead on some scheme.

Alaba is detailed here for **Nyambe**, though she can easily be adapted for other **d20 System** settings ("n'anga" is simply a variant of the standard cleric class), while the **GURPS** version below assumes a fairly standard low-tech fantasy setting. With a little adjustment, Alaba could appear in all sorts of games, including '30s style pulp supernatural horror *Cliffhangers* campaigns. (The **GURPS** version could, for example, lose her Secret, replacing it with a few levels of reduced TL, to become the high priestess of some remote, hidden village where the inhabitants engage in dark and twisted rites spoken of only in whispers by their neighbors.)

Alaba in Nyambe

Female Tembu Human, 5th level N'anga

SZ M (humanoid); HP 34; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+1 Sanguar, +1 Shield, +1 Dex); Atk +3 Melee (1d6+1/crit 19-20/x2 magic sickle); Face 5 ft. × 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Rebuke Undead, Spells; SQ Aligned Spells; AL NE; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +6; Str 8, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 15, Cha 13.

Skills: Concentration +5, Diplomacy +5, Knowledge (Arcana) +4, Knowledge (Religion) +4, Natural Medicine +4, Spellcraft +4.

Armor and Weapon Proficiencies: All Simple Weapons, Shields.

Feats: Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Sanguar, Toughness.

Languages: Kordo (Native).

Spells As a N'anga serving Zombi, Alaba's chosen domains are Death and Trickery. She typically has the following spells prepared:

0 Level -- Detect Magic ×2, Resistance ×3. 1st Level -- Bane, Cause Fear (Domain), Doom, Entropic Shield, Obscuring Mist. 2nd Level -- Death Knell, Desecrate, Hold Person, Invisibility (Domain). 3rd Level - Animate Dead, Animate Dead (Domain).

Equipment: +1 Keen Sickle, Supply of Lesser Zombi Powder (quantity at the DM's option), small wooden shield.

Alaba in *GURPS*

Alaba **141 points**

*Note: Some of the following character features come from **GURPS Magic**.*

ST 8 [-20]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10]

Secondary Attributes: SM +0; Dmg 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13; HP 10 [4]; Will 13 [5]; Per 13 [5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.

Social Background/Languages: TL 2* [0]; CF Homeland local/tribal [0]; Own Native Language Spoken (Native)/Written (Broken) [-2].

*Adjust level or points cost according to the campaign standard.

Advantages: Charisma 1 [5]; Comfortable Wealth [10]; Contact Group (Business skills, Effective Skill 12, Available Quite Often, Somewhat Reliable) [10]; Hard to Kill 2 [4]; Independent Income (Mercantile business interests) [5]; Luck [15]; Night Vision 3 [3]; Power Investiture 3 (Zombi the Serpent Lord) [30]; Reputation (+2, As a promising and effective cult leader, Among well-informed Zombi cultists in the region, All the time) [3]; Status 1 (Merchant family) [5].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Bloodlust (9) [-15]; Bully (15) [-5]; Callous [-5]; Duty (To the Zombi cult; Quite rarely) [-2]; Odious Personal Habits (Minor temper flare-ups, -1) [-5]; Secret (Leader of a hidden undeath cult) [-30].

Quirks: Entirely vicious and self-centered sense of humor; Vengeful. [-2]

Skills: Acting-11 (IQ-1, A) [1]; Area Knowledge (Home Town)-13 (IQ+1, E) [2]; Brawling-12 (DX+1, E) [2]; Current Affairs (Home Area Regional)-12 (IQ, E) [1]; Diplomacy-13 (IQ+1, H) [8]; Esoteric Medicine-11 (Per-2, H) [1]; Garrote-11 (DX, E) [1]; Herb Lore-12 (IQ, VH) [8]; Housekeeping-12 (IQ, E) [1]; Knife-13 (DX+1, E) [2]; Leadership-12* (IQ-1, A) [1]; Occultism-12 (IQ, A) [2]; Poisons/TL2-11 [2]; Public Speaking-12* (IQ-1, A) [1]; Religious Ritual (Cult of Zombi)-12 (IQ, H) [4]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-12 (IQ, E) [1]; Theology (Cult of Zombi)-11 (IQ-1, H) [2]; Urban Survival-12 (Per-1, A) [1].

* Includes +1 for Charisma.

Spells: Body of Shadow-12 [1]; Control Zombie-13 [1]; Fog-13 [1]; Mass Zombie-13 [2]; Pain-14 [2]; Reptile Control-13 [1]; Spasm-13 [1]; Steal Energy-13 [1]; Steal Vitality-13 [1]; Strike Numb-13 [1]; Turn Spirit-13 [1]; Zombie-14 [2]; Zombie Summoning-14 [2].

Personal Equipment: Fine Large Knife enchanted with Accuracy +2, Small Shield.

Designer's Notes

In Nomine Superiors: Lilith

by Elizabeth McCoy

Lilith has been many things to many people. Her possible origins include the wind-demon *lilitu*, the Sumerian demoness Lillake, Hebrew *layil* ("night"), the Greek Lamia (the Libyan queen deserted by Zeus) as well as the man-eating Lamiae -- who also insisted on being on top before they devoured their human victims . . .

It is, therefore, no wonder that the Lilith of *In Nomine* is an ever-changing creature, as hard to pin down to the page as her Word of Freedom suggests. She's the Bad Girl, the Seductress, the Femme Fatale -- and the only Princess in Hell who'd rather let even her enemies live, so long as they owe her. As a Divinely created human, she's potentially the ultimate stage of the species, with the power of a Superior. As a Princess of Hell, she's potentially the ultimate *fate* of humanity. Contradiction and contrariness define her nature, and ultimately, only the GM can decide whether Lilith is evil, ambiguous, or trapped by the follies of her youth.

As a sorceress and enigmatic being, Lilith can be used to ensnare mundane characters -- she can teach wonders to would-be magicians, and is more likely to require payment in this world than the next. And what modern mortal would think the concept of Freedom is *evil*?

As a Princess of Hell and human, Lilith can be petty. Slight her, thwart her, and she will find a way to work through agents and have her revenge. Homes repossessed, reputations ruined, jobs lost . . . Even better if the subject has to come crawling to some agent of hers and sink deep in debt just to survive.

As a wild woman and tragic figure, she can be the unlikely damsel in distress. Hints of empathy may show, along with suggestions of grief and regret. To rescue someone thought lost is an epic campaign. To rescue someone with the powers of a Superior, even more so. But pray that those are not crocodile tears.

Here are some ideas for adventures or entire campaigns; players should not consider them canon, but Game Masters have the Freedom to do whatever they wish . . .

Hung Upon the Double-Cross

Zerahiah, Seraph of Destiny, was placed on trial and found guilty of consorting with the Princess of Freedom. While he had meant to attempt to redeem her (as more than a few angels have tried), he had instead been ensnared in corporeality, forgetting his purpose and allegiances. Still, he had not become dissonant by nature or Word, and so his sentence was light -- to remain in Heaven two centuries, his Role and Earthly duties passed on to another.

Unfortunately, not two decades after his sentencing, Zerahiah has gone missing. His Heart is clouded, as Hearts often are in the presence of Superiors, but Yves says (in rare bluntness for that enigmatic soul) that Zerahiah is not in Lilith's *immediate* vicinity. Indeed, Yves is willing to tell would-be rescuers roughly where the wayward Seraph is!

And when they arrive at the nearly-forgotten mansion, can they persuade the Seraph to leave his apparent harem, whom he insists he's counseling to redemption? He's not dissonant -- at the moment -- but the motley batch of (attractive) Renegades he's preaching to don't look very redeemable. Still, even a Judge intent on sending Zerahiah back to his Heart the fast and Traumatic way can't afford to leave true redemption candidates behind unjustly.

Naturally, this is when the demons show up (the Game, the War, or Lust's Peine Forte et Dure (*Superiors 2: Pleasures of the Flesh*, p. 30)), gloating about the haul the Princess sold them.

Children of the Light

(This adventure seed does not draw upon actual canon in *In Nomine Superiors: Lilith* -- but it does extrapolate from certain aspects.)

The First Fallen's concubine has had a relationship with the Lightbringer that has lasted from the shores of the sea to at least the opening of Hell's gates. It's said that Lucifer first came to her as Seraph and Archangel . . . And perhaps it is true, for how else could a lineage of sorceresses, so clearly important to a Princess, remain free of the machinations of other Princes? (And why only *women*? Are the boys strangled at birth? Is parthenogenesis involved? Or is this simply a mystery of the Symphony?)

Not that PCs will know of that, until they come into the custody of a girl, mostly amnesiac after the (purely mundane) car wreck that has claimed the lives of her mother and aunt -- the only ones who might have known her other relatives or family friends, where she came from, or where they were going in such a hurry. Odd, that they weren't carrying any identification. Odder, though, that the young teenager already has seven Forces and command of Celestial Songs.

When Soldiers of God (or Hell, or both) come seeking her, it indicates *something* is up, of course. Now it will be up to the PCs to trace her scattered memories to her home, family, and coven, and hope that they're doing the right thing. Of course, if they *don't* return the child to her family, her so-many-times Great-Grandmother will move Heaven, Earth, and Hell to get her back -- and even mundane investigators won't be spared knowledge of the War.

The Night Demon

It is a peril, when one holds a Word, that the Word will be twisted by humanity. And if one's power-base requires the production of a special breed of demon, one cannot afford to seem weakened.

At least, that's the obvious reason why a selection of player characters have been charged, bribed, or geased to acquire as many children as they can, below the age of a year and a half -- and *not* warded by the names of Senoy, Sansenoy, and Semangelof -- and deliver them to the Princess at the dark of the moon, presumably so that their Forces may be recycled into Lilim.

Of course, it's also an unwise idea to leave witnesses to one's period of weakness. Perhaps competency and vows of secrecy will suffice. Perhaps more desperate payments will be required.

The B-Team

Lilith has a project in mind.

She has a team in mind for it.

The player characters are not that team.

However, the player characters *are* in position -- if they're clever -- to get the chosen team members in debt to them. (Whether or not hooks are involved depend on if there are Lilim PCs.) And *that* is their job. Do the right favors, bail out the targets, frame them so they can be bailed out, if necessary, and hand them over to the Princess. With a bow on top, if possible.

Of course, it's going to be interesting to acquire a Calabite of Fire, three Habbalah, an Impudite of Technology, a Renegade Balseraph of the Game with the Merciful Discord, and an Outcast Malakite of Flowers. They do have to be delivered alive, if not conscious.

Crossed, and Double-Hung?

Agents of the PCs' Prince(s) have received word that certain rogue elements (read: Renegades of their service) are in the player characters' territory. According to their informant -- a Lilim claiming to be discharging a Geas, and indeed a Geas did go "poof" afterward -- this lot of Renegades will be gathered together in a certain place at a certain time, ready for capture. Happy coincidence, the Renegades hardly outnumber the local demons at all! And most of them are 7 Forces, the size of new fledges. Easy glory, or at least easy clean-up before other Princes notice a group of organized Renegades.

And, indeed, there is a meeting of demons in the abandoned shell of a bankrupt store.

There's also a geased angel of Creation, frantically trying to convince the rogue demons about the glories of Heaven before they decide that they can get back into some Prince's good graces with a Divine sacrifice.

And then there's the Fire and Judgment angels, each independently tipped off via anonymous phone calls.

Finding a collection of ethereal spirits in the middle of a cage in the rafters -- about to be tipped open by a crude timer involving melting ice cubes -- might be overkill. Then again, it might not be.

And if it's a team of 16-Force Lilim who wind up rescuing everyone from the winners, one can be sure that the Geas-hook return was worth the investment.

Let's Twist Again, Like We Did Last Halloween

If there's one person who is associated with modern horror-suspense movies, it's M. Night Shyamalan. (There may well be another one, but I haven't been in the proximity of a nine-dollar tub of popcorn for a few months, so who knows what the directorial flavor of the month is nowadays. Heck, I may not even know the directorial flavor of the decade. In checking the [IMDB](#), I note that his breakthrough movie -- *The Sixth Sense* -- is so last millennium.) Anyway, as I was scrambling to come up with a topic on this -- my sixth Halloween-tied theme issue -- I've come to the conclusion that I know one thing that's unsatisfying to me about M. Night Shyamalan's movies . . . and, perhaps not surprisingly, it's a very similar thing that I find wrong with *The Twilight Zone*.

I was going to begin this column with the caveat that I haven't watched all the movies by the director in question. However, in consulting the aforementioned website, I note that I *have*, in fact, seen them all . . . or, at least, the four that are most closely tied to him. (To refresh your memory, that's *The Sixth Sense*, *Unbreakable*, *Signs*, and *The Village*.) Fortunately, some sense of normalcy returned to my life when I consoled myself by realizing that I haven't seen *everything* he's done. I haven't seen *Wide Awake*, which he directed, nor *Stuart Little*, which he wrote the screenplay for. However, given the writer's love of twist endings, it would not at all surprise me to learn that Stuart Little turns out to be Kaiser Soze.

And that's what we're talking about today, my friends -- the horrific potential of twist endings, and why they feel flat to me.

As an aside, I feel strange talking about Shyamalan's works without talking about the endings, although in general I'm usually loathe to talk about endings -- especially "twist" endings. So I'm going to try to be discreet, but consider this a blanket spoiler warning for the column. Oh, and it's also a retroactive spoiler warning for my Kaiser Soze reference above . . . unless you don't know what I'm talking about, in which case I assure you I'm not talking about any particular movie, and that's just a name I made up.

Anyway, quite possibly the biggest problem I have with many episodes of *The Twilight Zone* and Shyamalan's movies -- which I hadn't really cemented until talking about the protoidea for this column with my wife -- is that, for the most part, they end right when they begin. This advice was first presented to me by my late, great writing professor Dr. Jerome Stern, in his book *Making Shapely Fiction*. In his chapter "Don't Do This: A Short Guide to What Not to Do," he describes one of the stories one should not write:

The-Last-Line-Should-Be-The-First-Line Story: There's a story that keeps getting told, a kind of urban legend, about a shy little guy who falls in love with a mysterious, lovely woman. They plan to get married, and the man's office throws a bachelor party, get him drunk, take him to a brothel, push him into a room, where he finds . . . guess who?

Now the question is, where should this story begin? It's just a long lead-up to a nasty surprise ending. It could be interesting if its ending was its beginning. How would two people behave in this situation? Stories that lead up to revelations and odd situations really quit just when they should begin . . . As an opening, there is high tension, interest, and momentum -- readers want to know what happens next. As a conclusion, the revelation doesn't deal with the issue it raises.

Really, the same thing can apply to many of Shyamalan's movies, in my mind. In one movie the audience discovers that the entire situation has an unexpected architect. In at least half the movies, something is revealed that could change the outlooks of the "world" forever. Now what?

Of course, this quirk isn't limited to M. Night Shyamalan. For example, after having first seen it on video, my biggest complaint about *Stargate* was that it ended right when it should have begun -- okay, there's this working gate between two worlds, and it's raising very serious questions about the origins of humanity. Now what? (It turns out I was more correct than I could have imagined when *Stargate* spun off a few television shows; now, instead of wondering, "What happens next?" I find myself wondering, "When will the next *stop* happening?"

I've always felt there's something magical and special about *The Twilight Zone*. It's one of my favorite series, and its the archetypal example of the same basic formula that's used time and again in shows such as *Night Gallery*, *Outer Limits*, *Tales From the Dark Side*, and *Low Budget Tales of Cliched Horror*. But -- though I've wanted to, I've never figured out how to use this formula in an RPG. And I suspect it's because of this whole problem that the story ends right where the players would want to keep playing:

"Okay; you learn that this diner is actually hell, and the chef is the devil."

"Right. I hit him with a barstool."

"Errr . . . this is where you're supposed to cry pitiously for the camera, bemoaning your fate."

"Um . . . I think I'm going to stick with the 'barstool' plan."

The only RPG that I'm aware of that has tried to tap into this formula is West End Games' old *Tales from the Crypt* RPG. Unfortunately it's still sitting in one of the dusty boxes marked "BOOKS TO READ IN MY COPIOUS FREE TIME," so I haven't gotten to it yet. But I plan to, soon. Honest. However, judging by the scanty number of supplements that game produced, I can only assume it didn't exactly set the world on fire.

While it's been tempting for me in the past to use the "twist" ending, I've usually modified that to the twist middle or even twist beginning. That way, as the GM I get to react to the players' reactions, rather than merely having them react and have that be the end of the game. Because gaming is always about what happens next, and an answer of "Nothing; fade to black" is likely to end in a result that generates more fear for the GM from the players than the other way around.

--Steven Marsh

The Chosen of Yihdra

Powerful Servants of the Dream-Witch, for *Call of Cthulhu*

by J. Edward Tremlett

*"Don't think of this as death," the perfect man said, pulling his elongated fingers out of the bubbling, bloody ruin that was Harvey's best friend: "Think of this as . . . **conversion**."*

True to his word, the body changed as he walked towards Harvey. Thick green and red tendrils slowly pushed out of its gelatinous skin, creating a gnarled, meaty garden that dripped with fresh blood.

"Are you ready to meet the Maker, my son?" The perfect man asked, holding his bloody hands up to the sky.

Behind him, the tendrils burst into bloom, and each white flower's petals ringed a mad, staring eye -- eyes the same color as his still-living friend . . .

* * *

Not truly Avatars of the monstrous macroorganism known as Yihdra, the "Chosen" of the Outer God are Its eyes and hands on Earth. These genetically altered persons have been given a share of power in return for the insights their actions can give It, and allowed a measure of independent action -- for the moment, at least. And even if the Chosen are not aware of who It is, or what they have become, the Dream-Witch is watching, always . . .

The Chosen are a new Servitor Race for ***Call of Cthulhu***, and could be encountered in any time frame. Depending on their motives, and understanding of what they *really* are, the Chosen can be either minor curiosities or powerful adversaries. Wily Keepers should be able to imagine a number of uses for such beings, and further ideas are provided at the end of the article.

Information on Yihdra, and Its Children, can be found on page 53 of the ***Creature Companion***. One of Its more significant Avatars, "Madam Yi," is on page 32.

The Genesis of the Chosen

Like most of the Outer Gods, Yihdra is not an *entity* so much as It is a *force*. It is Evolution made flesh, existing only to adopt, adapt, and survive. And while It is much more intelligent than most of Its divine brethren, the Outer God is bereft of both creativity and a genuine personality, for the burning needs to survive and understand all life through meticulous study (and ravenous absorption) consume almost all of Its thoughts.

Yihdra is also stunted by a lack of creativity: It cannot envision anything It has not studied through absorption. It can create new life, and change what already exists to suit Its needs, but Its creations tend to be as simple as they are monstrous and grotesque. They are also very short lived, as, more often than not, It gives birth to these obscene wonders only to ingest them a moment later, to better understand what It has done.

These handicaps are considerable, and may account for why It remains an obscure entity, in spite of Its many Avatars. Most of Its actions are mapped out decades -- if not centuries -- in advance, and are not subject to change. It might alter Its plans in response to a direct, overwhelming threat to one need or the other, but many "smaller" things could go by while It focused on the larger picture. (Who knows how many of Its Cults burned while It focused on the immense wonders of a honeybee?)

However, the Dream-Witch has made a recent change of plan, due to Its recognition of a special quality of Mankind.

As a species, they are just another link in the chain of being, but they possess a creative intelligence that allows them to imagine things they have never seen, nor experienced. And it is this quality that has brought them near the top of the chain -- making them the dominant species of their world (for now . . .)

Once Yihdra realized this -- after countless centuries of observation and feeding -- It decided to alter some of Its long-range plans. It performed experiments among Its Children: human cultists who serve Its many forms, and are slowly changed to resemble their Avatar, however subtly. Over time, It was able to graft a significant measure of Its power into these previously-altered mortals without entirely subsuming their minds into Itself (which would have defeated the purpose).

The process became known as Elevation, and there was no shortage of volunteers. Once enough of the "Chosen" had been made, the process was perfected. And once enough perfect Chosen had been made, Yihdra rested, and allowed Its new servants to go out into the world, so that It might learn from their actions.

These creatures may have been "perfect," but the Chosen were still possessed of a frail, human mind. Some could not handle the power without going uselessly insane, forgetting their place in Its works, or setting themselves up as Gods and turning their backs on the Dream-Witch. These failures It eventually ingested, so as to learn from these mistakes.

But some of the Chosen maintained the balance between service, utility, and creativity, and these were allowed to go on. And to this day It watches these successful ones -- however languidly -- and visits them in shared dreams, so as to learn from their ideas.

Every so often one of the Chosen is Elevated a step further, so as to become a full Avatar of Yihdra. However, this is rare: Chosen will most likely serve as Priests to the Children, leaders of outside Cults or heralds of the Dream-Witch for a near-eternity.

An Alien Infection

After the Elevation of the initial, "perfect" Chosen, Yihdra stopped Its whole-scale experimentation on Its Children. However, It is known to generate more Chosen from time to time. This is mostly done to replace Chosen who have proven unworthy, and must be destroyed, but there are times when the Outer God Elevates a promising candidate to see what new insights he or It can bring to It. There are also "accidental" Elevations, which Yihdra tends to allow -- 9/10s of Evolution is accidental, after all . . .

There are now three ways to become Chosen.

Elevation

Yihdra can always Elevate one of Its Children, either in Its own, true form or through one of Its Avatars. The Elevation is accomplished by It in the same way It can warp and twist Its Children, whether they are nearby or far away. The Children like to think this is done as a reward for good work on Yihdra's behalf, but Its true reasons are often as alien as It is.

It prefers to Elevate within the context of an impressive ceremony -- one echoing the complex mating rituals of insects. At the climax of the ceremony, It will embrace Its Child and swallow him whole, so as to convert the Child within Its alien womb. And after nine days of incubation, Yihdra will give birth to the Chosen, much to the delight of Its minions. (1d8/1d20 SAN to be Chosen in this fashion.)

Infestation

Direct, flesh-to-flesh contact with Yihdra, one of Its Avatars, or another Chosen, may cause a portion of the Outer God's being to infect a human. If the infection comes from Yihdra or an Avatar, the mortal rolls his CON against Yihdra's POW of 60 to resist -- most likely a futile gesture. But if the mortal is infected by a Chosen, he instead pits

his POW against the Chosen's.

Those who resist feel a moment's discomfort as the infection is beaten, and they now have immunity against that Avatar or Chosen (there is no immunity against Yihdra in Its true form). Those who fail are infected, and will begin to manifest powers (and suffer visions) in a number of weeks equal to their POW minus 20. The period between will be filled with odd chills, fevers, and intestinal complaints that no doctor will be able to identify, and no amount of medicines will be able to cure. (No San lost until the Visions begin, and/or powers start to manifest.)

Gestation

Long before It made the Chosen, Yihdra's Children "seeded" random segments of humanity by mating with unaltered humans. Such offspring do not always become Children, but the "normal" babes still carry a recessive gene: one that, when dominant, grants a genetic predisposition towards the Outer God's control. Yihdra can spy on such persons at will -- no matter how far away -- and change or control them as It sees fit.

From time to time, two people who carry the recessive gene will mate, and their offspring will be "Seeds." These Seeds might still live their lives without ever coming into contact with the Dream-Witch, but if one of them encounters something directly related to Yihdra (witnessing an Avatar, discovering one of Its Cults, meeting the Children or the Chosen, or even reading one of Its names in a book) the portion of Yihdra within them may begin to germinate . . .

In times past, the Seed would be compelled by race memories to find the nearest Avatar, and become a Child of the God. However, now that Yihdra has instituted Its new plan, there is a chance that It will take notice of his investigations, and Elevate him on the spot. Then again, It might allow him to bumble forward, perhaps never to learn of his true heritage.

Mark of The Dream-Witch

The Chosen have a number of powers available to them, but not all Chosen are aware of what all they can do. Those who have been in direct contact with Yihdra or one of Its Avatars are usually given the full scope of their new powers, but those who are infected by the Chosen or have their genetic seed awakened, must discover these abilities one at a time. The visions they receive in dreams may provide clues, but it may take a successful Idea roll to prize any meaning from the grotesque flood of received images.

Upon Elevation, the effective POW of the Chosen is doubled. This increase is a gift from Yihdra, who is sharing a portion of Its power with the Chosen. However, the increase is more of a "reserve battery": should the Chosen spend enough MPs to get to one point below his old POW, all POW above it disappears, dropping him to his previous level. The increased POW will not come back until his full, natural POW is restored, either by natural regeneration or other means.

More importantly, the Chosen are effectively immortal, never aging past their day of Elevation, and never succumbing to sickness or disease. So long as they have enough MPs to heal themselves, they can take any amount of physical punishment. And so long as a single cell remains, Yihdra can fully reconstruct them -- should It choose to.

(Chosen must be careful of magical attacks, though: If the Investigators can remove enough of his MP or POW, Yihdra may release Its hold upon that Chosen, and take his powers with It. They can also be spiritually jailed through such spells as "Bind Soul" or "Imprison Mind," and Yihdra will not be able to take the Chosen's mind/soul to the nearest Avatar for rebirth when the body is destroyed. Keepers are in the clear to say what other Spells might disrupt the connection between the Outer God and Its servants.)

The Chosen also gain a number of other gifts from their God. These are not spells, per se -- rather special abilities that Yihdra makes available to Its notable servants, so It may learn from what they do. It can override, remove and replace any of these gifts that It cares to, should the need arise.

Telepathy: Chosen can hold mental "conversations" with anyone they can see, though this only fully works if they

share a language with the person they wish to communicate with. If they have no language in common, the conversation takes the form of images in each other's heads, which may require Idea rolls to comprehend. (1 MP per conversation to do this with normal humans; Free for Children, Chosen, Avatars or Yihdra Itself. 1/1d4 SAN the first few times this happens, for both parties)

Speak to the Animals: Chosen can speak to all earthly creatures with at least some intelligence (mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, etc.). This takes the form of images, and may require Idea rolls for both sides to comprehend. Note that Deep Ones, and other intelligent forms of life native to the Earth, would be spoken to using "Telepathy," instead.(1 MP per conversation. 1/1d3 SAN the first few times this happens)

Speak to Yihdra: Chosen can put themselves into telepathic contact with any Avatar of Yihdra they know of, or else Yihdra Itself. This can be done at any time, though some Avatars may be less than pleased to be disturbed, and speaking with Yihdra Itself is never a good idea. (2 MP per conversation that the Chosen initiates. For Avatars, Sanity cost is 1/half the Sanity for seeing the Avatar, if any, otherwise 1d5. For Yihdra, Itself, 1d5/1d50)

Detect Life: Chosen are made aware of all life -- plant, animal or alien -- within a number of yards equal to their effective POW, provided they stand still for a Round and think of nothing else. They can sense things they cannot yet see, but will not know what (or who) these things are unless they have used Detect Life on them before. (1 MP per scan. 1/1d3 the first few times they use it)

Rework Life: Much like their God, the Chosen can shape life to their desires -- healing, wounding or changing it as they will. They need only touch the skin of the subject, pit their POW against its CON, and then spend: 1 MP for each Hit Point they wish to give, or take; 1 MP for each physical Statistic they wish to give or take for 24 hours; or 3 MPs for each physical Statistic they wish to permanently give or take. Adding structures where there were none before, such as a wolf's claws on a human hand, either requires 1 MP to graft a fresh set of claws onto the hand, or 3 MPs to create them out of the hand.

Chosen can perform these Reworkings upon themselves, should they choose to, and in these cases the POW vs CON roll is not necessary: so long as they spend the MPs, it is successful.

The effects of successful Reworkings always "work," though they may not be very comely, efficient, or long-lasting. If the Chosen wants to Rework a subject with an eye on esthetics and long-term effects, Keepers should roll the Chosen's Biology, First Aid and/or Medicine to see if he can strike a balance between form and function. Without such rolls, the subjects may lose points from other Statistics (most often Appearance), and might even cost Sanity to see.

Reworking someone costs 1d3/1d6 SAN the first few times a Chosen does it, whether to himself or to others. Being Reworked costs between 1/1d4 for the willing cultist being "beautified" and 1d8/4d4 for a hapless victim being turned inside out.

Restore Life: Chosen can reanimate a human or animal corpse, so long as it's in good condition (perhaps requiring Rework Life to heal and de-putrefy). This requires the Chosen to pit his POW against the previous CON of the corpse, minus 2, and spend 5 MPs, plus 1 for each hit point he cares to gift the corpse.

The restored creature will live once more, but can never have more Hit Points than what the Chosen gifted it, unless the Chosen uses Rework Life to further heal it. The reanimated corpse will also be quite "off" -- sullen, non-communicative and behaving more like the Chosen that raised it than its old self. And if the Chosen should be permanently destroyed, any corpses he raised will momentarily follow him in death (Raising the dead costs 1d4/1d8 SAN the first few times it's done, and the corpse is charged 1d8/1d20 to come back to life.)

Curse of the Shrouded

The gifts Yihdra gives Its Chosen are powerful, but not free; They are Its instruments, to be used as It sees fit and then discarded -- or ingested -- when they serve no further use. Thanks to Its lack of direct concentration, most Chosen are not manipulated to the full extent that they could be, but the threat (or promise) of direct interference is constant. And

even Its partial interference leaves scars on both body and soul.

Odd Appearance: All Children who were Elevated retain the odd similarities to their Avatar. They can change this appearance, should they choose to, but this is often considered blasphemy, and only done in order to better infiltrate the outside world.

All other Chosen unconsciously Rework their own features, gradually changing themselves into what they *think* they look like, or would like to. As this change is not controlled -- most often happening in their sleep -- their normal appearance is always a little "off": their eyes may be too green, their skin too earthy, or their physique too perfect to be real. This costs no SAN to witness, but may decrease (or increase) APP by a point or two.

The Hunger: Much like their patron God, the Chosen are constantly hungry. If they don't eat a full meal's worth of food (cooked, raw, or still squirming) once every CON/3 hours, they lose 1 STR, 1 CON, and 1 DEX each hour until they've sated themselves. Lost Stats are regained in full following their meal.

Visions: The minds of the Chosen are telepathically linked to Yihdra, and they are able to tap into the mindscape created by Its Avatars. This can be consciously used to communicate with the Outer God ("Speak to Yihdra," above), but it has the side-effect of receiving Visions while asleep or unconscious. These Visions are Its memories, thoughts and plans -- endlessly pondered by a powerful, alien mind.

While dreaming, the Chosen must roll under their POW×5 in order to keep the Visions out of their dreams. If they fail, they are "treated" to a taste of Yihdra's maddening thoughts, and lose 1/1d4 SAN. Further, if they roll under their INT on percentile, they fully *understand* what they have seen, lose 1d3/1d8, and gain 1d4 Cthulhu Mythos.

Possession: At any time, for any reason, Yihdra can take control of Its Chosen and do what It will with them. Sometimes It will use them to speak or act on Its behalf, and sometimes It will use them to manifest one of Its Avatars -- or even Its own, truly indescribable form.

This usurpation costs It nothing, but will cost the Chosen anywhere from 1/1d6 to 1d8/1d20 Sanity, depending on what he has to witness. Those who are taken over by Avatars are sometimes Reworked back to their original form, sometimes left in a seeping, half-human state, and sometimes ingested from afar to feed the hunger of their God.

Insanity and the Chosen

It is almost impossible for the Chosen to be what they are and do what they do without going Indefinitely or Permanently Insane. How could a human -- however altered -- be mentally linked to the mind of an Outer God and remain sound and whole? Even with the distance Yihdra places between Itself and the Chosen, the "background noise" of the Visions almost guarantees mental ruin after a lifetime or two.

However, going horribly and terribly mad does not always equate with uselessness in the eyes of Yihdra. In fact, those who go BEYOND the bounds of mere sanity, and find a way to function without it, are extremely valuable to the Outer God. The insights such Chosen provide are sometimes the best ideas It receives.

So only those Chosen who completely break under the spell of the Dream-Witch -- becoming catatonic or stupefied -- are automatically ingested. Those whose insanity eventually stops them from generating useful insights will follow thereafter, but if they can come back from that precipice before It takes notice then It may spare them.

Then again, It may not.

Story Seeds

Having the cruel Mythos Sorcerer of the Scenario turn out to be a Chosen almost goes without saying, as it would expand the Investigators' worldview and create new Mythos challenges for them to solve. But there is so much more that can be done with them . . .

The Foe Who Would Not Die

A staple Mythos enemy is the cruel sorcerer who "dies" at the hand of an angry mob, decades or centuries ago, only to come back in the here and now. The Chosen present another way to accomplish this, only the rebirth will be nearly-instantaneous, courtesy of Yihdra's nearest Avatar. So the Investigators might think they've destroyed the Seekers of Xothra, only to have its Chosen Priest come back a week later at full power, with all memories of their last encounter intact, and a very nasty grudge . . .

The Miracleworker

Reports are coming in of someone special, out in a remote area. Perhaps this person can heal injured animals, have silent conversations with family members, heal the sick, or even raise the newly dead. They also say the miracleworker sees amazing visions (and prefer not to speak of the near-crippling hunger he has).

This person's amazing powers have attracted a cult of zealous followers, and they are not appreciative of "outsiders" poking their noses where they don't belong. Will the Investigators bring their house down around them when they reveal the true source of the miracleworker's power? Or will they leave well enough alone, and gamble the good being done against the possibility of the God's taking direct control . . . ?

Superspy of Yihdra

In an age of fingerprint and retinal scanners, biometric sensors and the like, a Chosen would be an ideal thief, spy, or saboteur. They can Rework themselves to assume the exact likenesses of others, and then go wherever those persons are allowed to go. Psychology rolls could be used to detect that the person's a little "off," but otherwise it's a perfect disguise.

What might a mercenary Chosen do with such powers, and how would the Investigators stop him? And even if they do, what's to stop Yihdra from ingesting the dead doppelganger from afar, and giving birth to him -- fully-formed -- somewhere else . . . ?

Framed by an Outer God

In the same vein as the "Superspy," what's to stop one of these creatures from impersonating an Investigator, or one of their friends or colleagues, to perform some otherwise-mundane criminal action? Even with a rock-solid alibi, such a frame-up would be almost impossible to completely disprove. And while this could be done to someone for any number of reasons, it makes for an especially underhanded form of revenge against the Investigators . . .

You Belong To Me

To bring the horror of the Mythos inside the party, have an Investigator be infected by Yihdra, or turn out to have been "seeded." If the poor fellow has never encountered one of the Chosen, or doesn't truly know what they can do, the visions and slow uncovering of Yihdra's gifts will add a creepy, personal angle to the Campaign. How will he tell his fellow adventurers that he's become possessed by one of the very things they're fighting . . . ?

This tactic is best used with one of your better players: one who can keep out-of-character secrets, and is willing to roleplay being the self-willed appendage of an Outer God. It could wind up being a lot of fun to have a "mole" in the party, but if the player starts taking undue advantage of the situation, and sees the powers more than the drawbacks, the Keeper always within rights to pull the plug -- most likely by having Yihdra take over . . .

Woodlands and Woodcutters

"I'm a Lumberjack and I'm Okay . . . "

by S.E. Mortimer

Introduction

It is difficult to overstate the importance of woodlands to low-tech communities. Many resources essential to their survival were directly or indirectly dependent upon the forest. Timber was used as fuel, for the manufacture of household items and tools, and for construction. The undergrowth was used as forage for pigs and cattle. Bark was collected for tanning leather. Resins and turpentine were extracted. Wild berries, nuts, mushrooms, and honey were collected to supplement the sometimes meagre diet. This work attempts to give some information to those who are interested in low-tech campaigns to help flesh out woodlands settings and give some insight into how woodcutters might live and work. Any **GURPS** rules endeavour to remain consistent with existing material in **Basic Set** and **Low-Tech** when possible.

The Forest

Disciple: "What is the forest of the King, and what is the reason for this name?"

Master: "The forest of the King is a safe lair for wild beasts; not of any kind of beast but of those of the woods only; not in any place whatsoever but only in certain places and in those suitable to the purpose; whence such a place is called a forest, the 'o' having been changed from 'e' as it was in 'feresta,' i.e., the place of wild beasts."

Disciple: "Is there a forest of the King in every county?"

Master: "No. But in wooded counties where there are lairs for wild beasts and forage in abundance; it is immaterial who owns the woods, whether the King or a noble, the wild beasts are safe and may roam at will anywhere."
-- Dialogue of the Exchequer (1177 A.D.), On Forests, Bk 1, C.12.

The Crown (via the local lord) usually claimed all rights to the woodlands in a demesne (and the wildlife therein) and granted licences and dispensations in return for feudal service or monetary compensation. "Forest" was a legal term, describing a wooded area subject to special Royal laws designed to protect the valuable resources of timber and game within its boundaries. These laws were strictly enforced by Crown employees. The Forester was in charge of the Crown's Forest and was sworn to attend upon the plants and animals ("vert and venison") within his "Bailiwick," to attack or arrest transgressors, and to bear witness against offenders in court. He had many assistants: agisters, rangers, wardens ("verderers"), bow-bearers, underkeepers, and underforesters. Penalties for infringing forestry laws were severe; the punishment for poaching could range from a fine or imprisonment to maiming, which might be loss of a hand, blinding, or even castration. Repeat offenders were sometimes executed. Outside the boundaries of the Forest, control was less strict, but often a Forest extended outside the woods to include heathland, meadows, and even some cultivated land.

In the Forest, commoners were usually permitted to collect deadwood for fuel

Coppicing

The word "coppice" comes from the French *couper*, "to cut." Coppicing is the art of cutting of trees and shrubs in such a way that allows vigorous regrowth and a sustainable supply of timber for future generations. Evidence of coppicing has apparently been dated to the Neolithic period. Coppiced trees and shrubs produce new saplings, which sprout from the base of the previously-cut plant (called "coppice stool"), that can sometimes grow over one foot per week. For most species, coppicing actually prolongs the plant's lifespan. Regular coppicing involves cutting all trees in a certain area but "standard coppicing" involves allowing a certain number of trees to grow to maturity. The amount varied, but in early 16th century England, regulations set this standard at a dozen

and to forage livestock (though sometimes licences were required even for these activities), but not to cut down trees or hunt game. In the village of Leafield near Wychwood Forest for example, the locals were only permitted to collect deadwood on Tuesdays and only so much as one man could carry. The saying "by hook or by crook" referred to the collection of deadwood: Fallen timber and brushwood would be cleared and collected using either a weeding hook or a shepherd's crook. Once each year, on Whitsunday, Leafield villagers were also permitted to hunt game in the Forest. There was a separate license for hunting small game called "warren." Some villagers were granted the right to "free warren" which meant that they were permitted to hunt rabbits, hares, foxes, cats, otters, martens, squirrels, etc. Sometimes "deer parks" were created within the Forest to make hunting easier for the nobility. These parks would consist of an area usually between one and two hundred acres (but became gradually smaller in later times) that was enclosed by banks and ditches topped with fences and hedges, thus trapping the deer within a controlled area.

Woodland Management

The "wood pasture" provided a largely subsistence-based local community with most of its requirements for fuel, building materials, food and forage. Typically there were more bad trees than there were usable ones in any given area of woodland. Reasons for this include previous logging activity ("high grading" involves taking only the best trees and moving on), invasive plant species, over grazing, pests, etc. Woodland management involves human intervention in the natural growth of a forest to increase the amount and quality of timber. Usually this management took the form of "coppicing" and "pollarding" (see textbox, right) to produce poles and laths for building. "Underwood" (twigs, brushwood, etc) was collected and used for domestic fuel. Sometimes cleared land that was deemed unsuitable for agriculture was replanted with quality species to improve the timber yield of a particular landholding.

The Woodcutter

Also called a "feller," the woodcutter lived on the fringe of medieval village society. He spent most of his life in the forest chopping wood for the local lord or working in conjunction with sawyers or charcoal burners ("wood colliers"). Villagers viewed anyone who lived outside the "civilized" borders of village, town, and castle with deep suspicion. The woodcutter had the double social disadvantages of living in the wild *and* being poor. There are many folk tales associating the woodcutter with symbols of both poverty and the "dangerous wilderness." Even in more modern times the woodcutter, or "logger," was considered to be rude and uncouth by townsfolk. Loggers were wild, boisterous, and rowdy. They lived deep in the woods for months at a time in logging camps where the work was long, hard, and dangerous. They evolved into a breed of men that, even today, symbolises strength, virility, and masculinity.

Because of the nature of his work, the woodcutter rarely lived in a fixed abode for any length of time. Many set up temporary shelters on the edge of the woods and moved on when the best trees had been harvested. In areas that contained dangerous wildlife, the shelters could be constructed in trees. For example, today in Bangladesh, woodcutter's shelters are constructed eight to 10 feet above the ground to reduce the likelihood of tiger attacks. Sometimes the woodcutter's entire family would travel with him, while other times he would leave them behind in the family home.

trees per acre of coppice.

Pollarding was similar to coppicing except that the new shoots were encouraged to grow horizontally rather than vertically. With coppicing, the tree is cut down low near ground level, but with pollarding, the tree was cut at a height of around six to eight feet. This was useful in areas where growth from the ground upwards was less desirable such as in woodland pastures. Pollarding permitted more of the ground to be used for grazing.

The poles of saplings were harvested for light carpentry work, fencing, basketwork, and fuel (firewood and charcoal). A stand of coppice (called a *copse*) was usually demarcated by an earthen bank, sometimes topped by a hedge. These were erected mainly to prevent grazing animals from destroying new growth. Occasionally, dry stone walls were constructed. Each copse typically covered an area anywhere from 12 to 50 acres.

Wood Stacking

Another occupation is that of "woodstacker." Although originally both cutting and stacking of timber would have been done by the same person, by the fourteenth century in

The medieval woodcutter and his family would be involved in the following activities: felling trees, coppicing and pollarding, uprooting unsuitable plants and preparing a glade for future use, bundling underwood into fagots (called "fagotting") for sale as domestic fuel, collecting suitable barks for the leather tanners, and making small amounts of charcoal for personal use. He might also work in sawpits or sawmills. Occasionally he would be called upon by his Lord to perform a specific task, such as providing material for a castle, manor house, mill, bridge, etc. Hazards of the job include being hit by falling branches or the whole tree; injuring oneself with the axe; forest fires; being attacked by poachers, bandits, or wild animals, plus any number of natural hazards that anyone travelling or camping in woodlands would face.

London, the occupations became so specialised that the Woodcutters' Guild was kept rigidly separate from the Woodstackers' Guild. These guilds fiercely guarded their spheres of influence and demarcation disputes were handled by a guild-court.

Fuel

Only a very small amount of harvested timber was used by the craftsman. The vast majority was consumed as fuel (firewood and charcoal). There is an old saying -- firewood warms you three times: once when you cut it; once when you carry it; and once when you burn it. In cooler climates it has been estimated that a cottager's family required between one quarter and one half an acre of 20-year-old coppice wood (six to 12 cords) for heating each year. If the wood needs 20 years to regrow then each family required between 5 and 10 acres of woodland for a constant supply of fuel (modern wood heaters are much more efficient, usually requiring less than one cord per year). According to **Low-Tech** (p.LT39) freshly cut (green) hardwood contains 30% water and has an energy content of about 7,000 kilowatt-seconds (kWs) per pound. After seasoning, its water content drops to 15% and its energy output increases to 8,200 kWs per pound. Coniferous woods contain 40% water and 7,500 kWs per pound when green and 10,000kWs per pound when seasoned.

Fagot: A "fagot" or "bavin" of firewood is a bundle of timber roughly six feet by three feet by three feet, or 54 cubic feet. It usually consists of "deadwood," such as brush and twigs, rather than felled trees and sawed branches. A fagot might contain 20-25 cubic feet of solid wood. Two fagots of brushwood could bake thirty loaves of bread, or fire three terracotta bricks, or provide warmth for a small, one-room cottage for a week or so.

Cord: A "cord" is the traditional volume used to measure firewood. It is a stack roughly eight feet by four feet by four feet, or 128 cubic feet. This stack contains an average of about 80 cubic feet of solid wood. An acre of 20-25 year old native trees produces approximately 20-25 cords of wood. Managed pine plantations can produce more than double this amount. An average woodcutter could cut two cords of wood per day. An experienced woodcutter could cut three cords.

White coal: This is timber that has had its bark stripped and then dried in a kiln (but not rendered into charcoal) for use as fuel. Some industries that made use of white coal included ceramic, glass, and lead smelting. White coal burned hotter than regular timber but cooler than charcoal and so was unsuitable for industries such as iron smelting, smithing, and so on. An upcoming article will go into more detail about the use of charcoal.

Prices

The price of firewood varied greatly depending on season, availability, distance to source, etc. In England, between 1250 and 1350, a cord of firewood varied between 6 and 12 shillings, but 8 shillings is a reasonable average cost. For comparison, [Tilting at Windmills](#) states that a bushel of wheat costs 1.5 shillings (18 pence) during the same period or \$30 (**GURPS**). A cord of firewood would therefore cost \$160 or about \$70 per fagot. A years' worth (6-12 cords) of firewood would cost between \$1,000 and \$2,000. Heating one's home was an expensive proposition if you didn't have free access to deadwood in nearby woodlands. The incentive to circumvent the Lord's regulations on collecting firewood would have been great.

New Skill: Lumberjack (ST/Easy) (defaults to Carpentry -2).

In order to prevent an unnecessary plethora of skills that are closely related, a single Professional skill will be created to handle all related occupations. Lumberjack (*ST/Easy*) will be the skill used to acquire and process timber. Carpentry (p.183) will be reserved for working with wood that has been prepared with the Lumberjack skill. This skill involves managing the woodland through various techniques including coppicing; knowing which trees would be suitable for felling; knowing the most efficient way of felling these trees and which tools to use; the physical act of felling the tree; care and maintenance of timber-felling and sawing tools; and operating a sawpit or a sawmill. Some maneuvers would be based on other attributes besides ST. For example, Per might be used to select suitable trees for felling, and DX might be used to repair a tool (though the Smith skill would be needed for major repairs).

The **GURPSnet** Archives has a document about [Architecture](#) written by Matt Riggsby and his suggestions are worth repeating here:

A team of foresters with axes and saws can harvest 3 x ST cubic yards of simple logs and rough beams per day. For example, a man with a ST of 10 can produce 30 cy per day. Softwoods weigh 800 to 1,000 pounds per cubic yard. Hardwoods weigh 1,200 to 1,500 pounds per cubic yard.

It is required that at least one man in 10 has Survival (Woodlands) at 12+. If not, someone must default it (IQ-5, Naturalist-3). One Survival roll must be made per day (see pp.B223-24). A successful roll allows the full amount of lumber to be harvested. A failed roll halves this amount and a random member of the team takes 1d of injury. A critical success increases the day's harvest by 20%. A critical failure halts production for the day and one member of the team is injured for 2d damage.

If a character has the Lumberjack skill at expert level (14+) then he might increase his daily production to 4 x ST since he works more efficiently than less experienced woodcutters (he often has a higher ST too). The Lumberjack skill may also be substituted for Survival in some situations (GM's decision).

Low-Tech has rules for felling trees with stone age tools (TL0) on p.LT16.

Sawpits

Sawyers or "board hewers" selected the best of the logs to cut up into planks and beams to be jointed by carpenters. In a managed woodland, the timber was often sawn on site, and today, the remains of sawpits can sometimes be identified as depressions, often near a major track or a convenient waterway. Sawtimber logs must not contain too many defects such as decay, scars, bulges, bark distortions, holes, branch stubs, and crookedness. The logs were slung over pits to allow one sawyer to get underneath the tree while his sawing partner stood on the log above. A common occupational hazard was conjunctivitis caused by sawdust falling into the eyes. Respiratory diseases were also common. Sawdust is also a fire hazard and fine sawdust can explode if enclosed.

Mr. Riggsby's rules again seem reasonable and are repeated here:

Once the timber has been harvested, carpenters are required to shape it into boards. Carpenters can produce an average of one square yard of board per man point of Carpentry skill per day. The exact volume of wood depends on the thickness of the boards (cutting thick boards doesn't take more time but it requires more trees to be cut to produce a given area of wood). Carpentry skill is at an effective -1 for every half-inch of thickness beyond the first and -3 for working with hardwoods. All members of the team should have Carpentry at 12+. Water- and wind-powered sawmills, which become available late in TL3, can double production rates.

Timber Weight

This table approximates the weight per cord of timber depending on tree species.

Species	Green	Seasoned
Ash	4,000 lbs	3,400 lbs
Cedar, red	3,200 lbs	2,700 lbs
Elder, box	3,500 lbs	2,500 lbs
Elm	4,400 lbs	3,000 lbs
Hickory	5,000 lbs	4,200 lbs
Maple, sugar	4,400 lbs	3,500 lbs
Oak	5,000 lbs	3,800 lbs
Pine, shortleaf	4,100 lbs	2,700 lbs
Walnut, black	4,600 lbs	3,200 lbs

The GM may place arbitrary limits on the maximum length of cut boards. Major construction projects were occasionally delayed as the result of a search for large enough trees to produce the required beams, and extremely long lumber was often imported from distant forests.

It is suggested that the newly proposed Lumberjack skill could be substituted for Carpentry for those working in sawpits and sawmills.

Construction

A constant source of timber for building construction was very important. Each new house would require logs from over a dozen oak trees. A new church might require the timber from 300 to 400 trees. Mr. Riggsby's article goes into building construction in great detail and there is no point repeating it here.

Equipment

Axes: The single-bit axe is safer for inexperienced woodcutters to use because it only has one cutting edge. Experienced woodcutters usually use a double-bit axe, which has two cutting edges. **Low-Tech** (p.LT35) states that a bronze axe will enable a 1 foot oak to be felled in 20 minutes. An iron axe enables a 1 foot oak to be felled in 15 minutes (p.LT59). Experienced woodcutters could fell trees even faster. Weight 5-20 lbs. Cost: \$50-\$70 (p.LT55).

Saws: Used for removing branches and shaping planks and beams. **Low-Tech** (p.LT55) states that the notion of bending alternate saw teeth left and right was not developed till the end of the Bronze Age. A two-man saw weighs 5 lbs and costs \$10.

Scaling Equipment: Ropes and tree climbing spikes and slings are also required. These are covered in [Scaling the Heights."](#)

Transportation: Equipment for moving the timber is necessary. Sledges or wagons would be pulled by teams of oxen. Alternatively, logs could be floated down a nearby river. The difficulty involved in moving logs by land meant that the timber was often processed on-site as much as possible.

Roleplaying Suggestions

- The heroes are traveling through the woods and come across the local lord who is hunting game with a small party of nobles. The party has unwittingly wandered from the common woods into the Lord's Forest and all hunting and woodcutting is illegal here without the appropriate licences. The Lord's Forester is present and he approaches the party to inspect their belongings. If there is any evidence of poaching or illegal wood harvesting, they had better produce the correct paperwork, or have someone who is very skilled at Fast Talk.
- The PCs have been hired by the local Forester to apprehend some particularly troublesome poachers. They can either attempt to track the offenders, or they could find an area frequented by game and patiently wait in hiding for the poachers to come by. The "ghillie suit" made famous by modern sniper movies was originally created by Scottish gamekeepers ("ghillies") to help them catch poachers. See [The Art of Camouflage](#) for more detail.
- The party is camping in the local forest and enjoying a late afternoon meal by the campfire. They spot three men with spears and bows. The largest of the three is carrying a deer carcass across his shoulders. These men are poachers. Since the PCs have seen them, the poachers decide to stop them from informing the authorities. The deer will be dropped and the poachers will dash to cover. The stealthiest of the trio will circle around to try and stop the PCs from fleeing while the other two pin the PCs down with arrows. Then they will move in . . .
- There was a legal requirement for all hounds greater than a certain size to have their claws extracted, so they didn't injure the forest game. This was called "lawing." If any of the PCs owns a hound or mastiff and hasn't had it declawed, then he will face court and a fine. If the court official finds the PC offensive, or if the local Lord expresses an interest in the PC's hound, the animal could be confiscated. If this hound actually injures or kills any game in the forest then there will be very serious consequences. The owner of the dog will face the same

penalty that a poacher would face (heavy fine, maiming, etc.)

- While the party is traveling through the woods, a small boy runs up to the PCs. He is out of breath and pants that his father, a local woodcutter, is hurt. A tree has fallen and pinned him underneath. The tree is too heavy to lift without some sort of mechanical assistance. If the PCs manage to rescue him, he will need medical attention.
- January is known as "Wolf Month." Wolf packs driven by snow and cold can come closer to human settlements. Food is scarce at this time of the year and some wolves overcome their natural fear of man to enter villages and carry off livestock or even small children. Medieval accounts even report grown men and their horses being attacked by wolves as they traveled through the forest.

Remember, Remember!

*"Remember, remember,
The Fifth of November,
Gunpowder, Treason, and Plot.
I see no reason why gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot."*

-- traditional English song

Four hundred years ago Saturday, the world almost ended. Or not. Some see an embarrassing fizzle of decayed gunpowder and outmoded belief; others see the hand of Satan struck down by a Protestant God. Still others see a conspiracy to falsify a conspiracy, or an excuse to set fires and riot in memory of law and kings. What do we see, our eyes dazzled by the firelight, as we seek out the burning figure atop the bonfire? A spark, at least.

"This last Night the Upper House of Parliament was searched by Sir Tho. Knevelt, and one Johnson, Servant to Mr Thomas Percy was there apprehended who had placed 36 Barrells of Gunpowder in the Vault under the House with a Purpose to blow the King and the whole company, when they should there assemble. Afterwards diverse other Gentlemen were discovered to be of the Plot."

-- entry in the journal of the House of Commons, November 5, 1605

That terse entry, an early contender for "stiffest of stiff upper lips," makes an excellent summary of the Gunpowder Plot, with the exception that it records "one Johnson" as the man apprehended in the cellar beneath the House of Lords. Interrogation rapidly stripped that alias away, and he was revealed as one Guido "Guy" Fawkes, a soldier of wide experience. He was the hard man, the explosives expert brought into the Plot by its ringleader Robert Catesby, to make sure the job got done. Fawkes and Catesby, and the other eleven conspirators, were all Catholics, frustrated both by the continuing proscription of their faith by the Anglican authorities in England and by the "flaccidity" of Henry Garnet, the Jesuit superior of England and theoretical head of the Catholic underground.

Garnet preached Christlike "passive resistance" to Anglican injustice; Catesby (who had earlier done time for his part in the Earl of Essex' botched rebellion) preferred revolution. One of the Plotters, Thomas Percy, rented a cellar underneath the House of Lords, which Fawkes stocked with 36 barrels -- around two and a half tons -- of gunpowder. With his circle, he planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament during the Royal Opening of Parliament on November 5, killing King James I, Crown Prince Henry, and virtually the entire Anglican ruling class at one blow. Along with a number of Catholic peers of the realm, of course, but Catesby could live with that. Not so Catesby's co-conspirator Francis Tresham, whose Catholic brother-in-law, Lord Monteagle, was one of the Lords scheduled to attend the Opening. Tresham wrote a "dark and dubious" letter to Lord Monteagle, hinting broadly at the "terrible blow" destined for Parliament, and suggesting that his Lordship might want to absent himself from the Opening. Instead, on October 26, Lord Monteagle turned the letter over to Lord Salisbury, perhaps better known as Robert Cecil, the head of James I's secret service. Who did nothing for ten days.

"[O]ur Adversaries . . . do endeavor (with a strange Confidence, to give it no worse name) to persuade Men to believe, That the Gun-powder Conspiracy was no Popish Plot, but Cecil's Contrivance. One of their late Scribblers says indeed, That it was A HORRID PLOT; but adds, That it was suspected, to BE POLITICKLY CONTRIVED BY CECIL. And then afterwards, towards the end of that Popish Calendar or Almanack, he more confidently saith, That the Gunpowder Treason, was MORE THEN SUSPECTED, TO BE THE CONTRIVANCE OF CECIL, the great Politician, to RENDER CATHOLIKES ODIIOUS."

-- Thomas Barlow, Bishop of Lincoln, from his Preface to the 1679 edition of *The Gun Powder Plot: The King's Book*

Cecil's inaction renders a murky situation virtually opaque. By his own account, he forebore to warn the King, but did alert the Privy Council. But by any reading, he waited until almost the last minute, the early hours of November 5, before taking concrete action, ordering a search of the cellars below Parliament. (According to King James' own, admittedly immodest, account, it was only after the King ordered a search that one finally occurred.) And sure enough, the Beefeaters found Guy Fawkes literally holding a slow match over 36 barrels of gunpowder. Under torture (illegal at

the time unless specially ordered by the Crown -- which it was), Fawkes named his co-conspirators, who had fled London on the news of his capture. Incredibly, Catesby still tried to rally the Midlands to the Catholic cause, claiming that Parliament and the King were really dead. After nearly blowing *himself* up (while trying to dry his would-be rebellion's gunpowder stores by the fire), Catesby and three fellows died in a shoot-out on November 8. The informer Francis Tresham died, conveniently if mysteriously, in the Tower on December 23; the other eight Plotters were hung, drawn, and quartered in two batches on January 30 and 31, 1606.

Even at the time, the conspiracy theorists went to work on the case, many of them with royal sanction arguing that the whole Plot was the brainchild of the Jesuits, especially the "equivocator" Henry Garnet. Garnet knew of the Plot, but maintained at his trial that he had heard of it under the seal of the confessional. He was not helped by his extensive contacts with all the Plotters, or by the doctrine promoted by some Jesuits that regicide was justified if the king oppressed Catholics. Garnet was hanged on May 3, 1606. On the other front, there were those (especially Catholics) who argued that the whole thing was a put-up job by Cecil, who either allowed the Plot to go forward in order to get an excuse to really clamp down on Catholics, or who actively instigated it through his wily agent provocateur Thomas Percy, and used Catesby and Fawkes as dupes. Some even whispered that Percy, or Tresham, or both, had faked their deaths and been given new lives and cover identities in Spain. Still others argue that Cecil created the Plot sincerely, intending to make himself dictator in the panic following the blast; his brother-in-law Henry Brooke had been implicated in two other plots against James I, after all. An extreme case, that the whole Plot never existed at all but was fabricated entirely by Cecil using double agents and actors (all killed afterward to silence them), has been made (if not particularly convincingly) most recently by one Francis Edwards, who as it happens is a Jesuit priest.

"The night has been unruly: where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' the air;
strange screams of death, And prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion and confused events
New hatch'd to the woeful time." -- William Shakespeare, Macbeth, II:iii:54-59

And even the powder trails leading off the historical track are tangled and confused. According to the official inventory, the powder under Fawkes' match was "decayed," which has led many historians to argue that it would not have detonated even if Lord Monteagle had skipped town. (This would help explain why Cecil was so relaxed about two tons of gunpowder under his sovereign.) However, an experiment performed by ITV in 2005 (and studies in 2003 by the University of Wales) indicate that even "decayed" powder, confined in barrels, would have detonated spectacularly, destroying everything within 100 yards and breaking windows up to two thirds of a mile away. Surely, one imagines, an experienced artilleryman like Guy Fawkes could be trusted to successfully detonate some portion of the mine, "decayed" or not.

The Plotters had planned to kidnap the nine-year-old Princess Elizabeth and make her Queen, marrying her to a local Catholic noble to create a Catholic dynasty. If their coup had succeeded, one might see a surly, rebellious Presbyterian Scotland (complete with a bomb-planting terrorist SRA) resist the autocratic Catholic United Kingdom of England and Ireland down to the modern day. America might have become an independent Protestant country (perhaps even a kingdom under the fugitive four-year-old Prince Charles, if he escaped the Plotters in 1605) populated by Puritans and increasingly distressed Anglicans and Huguenots. On the other hand, it is far likelier that a successful Powder Treason atrocity would have brought forth the whirlwind. A Cecilite reign of terror and ethnic cleansing against the fearful Catholic population of both England and Ireland would be popular and led by a fanatically Protestant Queen Elizabeth II aching for vengeance against her slaughtered family, resulting in a centralized Protestant monarchy on the model of Prussia. Two roads to tyranny, both avoided by a few hours and a nervous brother-in-law. No wonder the British celebrate.

*"So then they put poor Guy to death, for ages to remember,
And boys now kill him once a-year, in dreary, dark November;
That is -- I mean his effigy, for truth is strong and steady --
Poor Guy they cannot kill again, because he's dead already."*
-- Anonymous, "The Guy Fawkes Song" (ca. 1830)

Guy Fawkes Day is the only great holiday celebrating something that *didn't* happen, and it's quintessentially British in that respect, and also in its astonishing resilience. The celebration of Guy Fawkes Day began as a feast of religious

obligation -- good Anglicans went to church on November 5, 1606 (and for many years thereafter) to thank God for His miraculous deliverance of King James. Although it took off slowly, it soon became a perfect holiday of [bisociation](#); those opposed to Charles I's increasingly Catholic tendencies could light the bonfires and burn the Pope in effigy, while those who loved him could praise God for delivering his father from the fire. Rather than suppress it, Cromwell encouraged Guy Fawkes Day as a celebration of Parliamentary rule. As the only holiday left on the calendar by the Puritan Revolution, Guy Fawkes Day really took off -- but when the Stuarts came back under Charles II, Gunpowder Treason Day was once more a day to thank God for the Stuarts. And when William of Orange chased off the Stuarts, the bonfires were lit to praise God for delivering England from James II. The Hanoverians tried to ignore it out of existence, but "bonfire societies" composed of men in coal-blackened faces lit the fires and burnt the Guy in effigy, until the Victorians' obsession with tradition restored the holiday to the official calendar. With tradition once more a dirty word to swank post-moderns, Guy Fawkes' antinomian attitudes are invoked by lighting a giant fire in the town square, and authority figures such as Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair are burnt in effigy to celebrate the continuance of divinely guided rule.

"In the popular customs connected with the fire-festivals of Europe there are certain features which appear to point to a former practice of human sacrifice. We have seen reasons for believing that in Europe living persons have often acted as representatives of the [gods] . . . There is no reason, therefore, why they should not have been burned, if any special advantages were likely to be attained by putting them to death in that way. . . . Now, in the fire-festivals which we are discussing, the pretence of burning people is sometimes carried so far that it seems reasonable to regard it as a mitigated survival of an older custom of actually burning them. . . . this suggests a doubt whether the Celts . . . also may not have celebrated their principal rites of fire, including their burnt sacrifices of men and animals, at . . . the beginning of November . . . "

-- Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*

Tossing effigies onto bonfires in Britain does, it seems, predate Guy Fawkes' arrest. On Accession Day, November 17, during Queen Elizabeth I's reign, it was customary to burn the Pope in effigy, and much Victorian ink has been spilled on the odd similarities between Samhain bonfires, in which a [scarecrow](#) or corn-dolly might be burnt on October 31, and the burning of Guy Fawkes in effigy just five nights later in modern Britain. Interestingly enough, November 5 can be seen as a truer Samhain, and a better "hinge of the year" than October 31. Guy Fawkes Day is, as it happens, exactly equidistant between fall and winter, being 45 days from both the autumnal equinox (September 21) and the winter solstice (December 21). The Hopi "new fire" ceremony Wuwuchim, and the Hindu festival of lights, Diwali, both usually fall closer to Guy Fawkes Day than they do Halloween; both are "movable feasts" dependent on the moon and stars.

As, it turns out, was Guy Fawkes Day. Because the "Fifth of November" was, to Guy Fawkes and all good Catholics -- and since 1752 to everyone in the Western world -- November 15. In 1605, England was still on the Julian calendar, while Catholic Europe rejoiced in Gregorian splendor ten days in the future. And on November 15, we find the tremendously interesting and instructive Roman festival, Feronia, about which very little is known except that it involved fire, feasting, music, singing, and public drunkenness. The fire goddess Feronia is also known as Saturnia, a female aspect of Saturn, god of time and agriculture. Interestingly, "Gaius" is the male form of "Gaia," which would make "Gaius" Fawkes an aspect of Saturn to the fire's Feronia. It gets even better, of course. The original date for the Gunpowder Treason was October 3, 1605, when King James I was originally scheduled to open Parliament. (He postponed it for a month due to lingering bubonic plague in the city.) And October 3 is neatly bracketed between a solar eclipse on October 2, 1605, and the Jejunium Cereris on October 4, another Roman fertility festival created by the order of the Sibyls in 191 B.C. to placate the goddess Ceres "after a series of disasters." This seems to have been modeled after the Greek Thesmophoria (apparently held in late September or October), a secret feast in which pigs were sacrificed to Demeter Thesmophorous, the bringer of divine law.

"[It] cannot be enough admired the horrible and fearful cruelty of their Device, which was not only for the destruction of my Person, nor of my Wife and Posterity only, but of the whole Body of the State in general . . . [But] which is most cruel and unmerciful of all, is the destruction by insensible and inanimate things; and amongst them all, the most cruel are the two Elements of Water and Fire; and of those two the Fire most raging and merciless."

-- James I, speech before Parliament November 9, 1605

So just after the death of the Sun, and before the birth of the Law, October 3 would have been a mystical dead space in which kingship hung suspended. The blast of the gunpowder, over twice that needed to destroy the building, was intended not just to dethrone James but to remake the world. The Plotters would offer not an effigy king, or a pig, or even a sacred [scapegoat](#), but a True King, a Stuart of the ancient Bloodline. By "most sacrilegious murder" they would "break ope the Lord's anointed Temple," an act of ultimate magical nihilism. There were thirteen Plotters, just enough for a witches' coven, or a Satanic esbat. They knew the rites of gunpowder and [tobacco](#) (all the survivors smoked furiously during their trial) that awoke the [Petro Loa](#). Perhaps they even knew the Song of Blue Mask, carefully sung by the Hopi shamans during Wuwuchim because of its power to bring about cosmic disaster. They had access to that mystical knowledge somehow; perhaps through Thomas Percy's second cousin Henry Percy, the "Wizard Earl" of Northumberland, or through Robert Catesby's second cousin-in-law, William Shakespeare, who wrote down his mystical rites of [king-killing](#) and [global destruction](#) in the next year.

But something went wrong with the time. Perhaps Shakespeare, grateful at being a King's Player, put a burr under Cecil's saddle; perchance some [plague guardian](#) of London simply did not wish to see the world remade. So Percy and Catesby rebalanced their figures, working with the confluence of Feronia and the true Samhain, hoping to woo Gaia with Gaius, hoping to at least trigger a [reality quake](#) to bring about the killing of the King by sheer belief. Hence Catesby proclaiming success in Warwickshire, hence the second desperate attempt to blow up their own house and become sacrifices themselves. Hence, perhaps, the nightmare of Plotter Robert Wintour, who dreamed on November 7, Hecate's Night, that "he thought he saw steeples stand awry, and within those churches strange and unknown faces." But it was not enough. Instead James and Cecil won, and it was Guy Fawkes who became the scapegoat, the burning man given up to Demeter Thesmophoros by (blue?) masked revelers who keep the world alive to remember, remember, the Fifth of November.

Somewhere Between Fact and Fiction Lie Factions

As I've mentioned before, I'm an avid [Slashdot](#) reader. One of the recurring themes on that geek-speak site is a distrust of powerful factions that have the ear of congress, who can use their influence to pass laws favorable to the factions but disadvantageous to the techies. I'm not sure why the Slashdot regulars are always so surprised when their efforts to thwart these folks go unheard. I mean, it's an age-old truism: Factions speak louder than nerds.

That completely irrelevant anecdote was a direct lead-in to this week's theme.

Many -- if not most -- game universes have factions of some sort. For example, a fantasy setting might have warriors, bards, and wizards, while a sci-fi setting might have space knights, pilots, and nobles.

The difficulty comes in trying to add a new faction to this established order. Usually, most of the "obvious" ones have been added. How, then, can you add a new faction without taking anything away from what's already there? For example, if you add a class of martial artists to an old-school fantasy game, then you run the risk of either making martial artists weaker than regular fighters (in which case, what's the point of playing this new class, from a purely party-effectiveness point of view?) or making them stronger than regular fighters (in which case, why would anyone play a regular fighter, and why hasn't the world heard of these guys before)?

As an aside, I suspect this difficulty is one of the reasons why the classical *Dungeons & Dragons* thief had a hard time getting established in that game. The thief was the last "main" class added, after the obvious fighters/magic-users/clerics classes had been developed. As such, the thief probably had a hard time carving out a share of respectability from the triad:

Thief: I steal stuff!

Fighter: Me too. I just make sure the previous owner is napping in a puddle of his own blood first.

Thief: Umm . . . I can open doors.

Fighter kicks down the door.

Thief: Err . . . I hide in shadows?

Magic-User: I've been doing that for years. I'm so good, I'll often hide *outside* the dungeon we're in; sometimes I'll be hiding behind a margarita in my lab.

Some games don't even make an attempt at maintaining a balance between what has gone before. They'll simply add in, say, a powerful new barbarian group, little caring that it throws the old order out of whack. "Power creep" is common in these settings, to the point where -- after a few years -- the core groups from the main rulebook might look positively quaint.

Assuming most of the "good" or obvious faction ideas have been taken, here are a couple of ideas for finding new fallow ground within a campaign:

The same, but different: There are many examples in the world of groups that have the same or broadly similar roles, but for which the execution is wildly different. For example, in the real world police officers and soldiers serve roughly the same purpose: preserving order and defending its citizens. However, the scope of their activities are wildly different; your average lieutenant has a hard time mingling among civilians looking for information, while a city-beat police detective will usually avoid the extra paperwork that comes with the discharge of a LAW rocket.

To make up a concrete example, suppose one wanted to create an interplanetary police force in the *Star Wars* universe. Well, the obvious problem is that one such organization already exists: the Jedi Knights. How can you apply the "same but different" mantra to our spacecops?

The two obvious ideas that spring to my mind would be methodology and means. On the means side, access to mad-whack Jedi powers are part and parcel of being a Jedi. As such, maybe our space cops are those with the will and hearts similar to the Jedi in terms of their desire to do good, but who don't have access to Force powers, perhaps

because they have low midichlorian counts [*PUTS GUN IN MOUTH*]. In terms of methodology, the Jedi are a loose-knit organization (or, after *Episode III*, they're a daisy-up-pushing organization); individual members are expected to go out into the world and do good, unless they're feeling [lazy](#).

Our *Star Wars* space cops, on the other hand, probably have very formal rules and regulations. They would have standard protocol for jurisdiction, proper procedures, permissible force, accountability, and so on.

Having envisioned this, this new group suddenly feels not like a competitor, but an augments. The Jedi might view these cops as being too rigid (or, worse, jackbooted thugs in training) while the space cops might see the Jedi as being unpredictable, unaccountable, and largely ineffective. Immediately a half-dozen roleplaying and adventure ideas spring to mind with this dichotomy.

I've [written before](#) about another example of this technique, where a player made a Jedi whose outlook was based on the Victorian ideal rather than the chivalric one.

Better, but limited: An alternative to worrying about balance is to throw caution to the wind, and make a new group that's more effective or powerful in certain ways, but more limited as a whole. To continue our *Star Wars* outing, suppose we wanted another group of Force wielders, but the whole Jedi/Dark Jedi thing feels overused. Well, perhaps someone (or someones) has found a way to augment people who didn't have access to Force powers to do so now . . . perhaps by injecting synthetic midichlorians into their blood [*PUTS BIGGER GUN IN MOUTH*]. In this case, the practitioners might be able to access greater powers than even the mighty Jedi, but at a cost . . . say, their assured death [within a year](#).

Suddenly there's the possibility of a new threat to those Jedi PCs (who are probably getting tired of being confronted with "yet-another-vastly-powerful-Dark-Jedi-you've-never-heard-of"), or even a grim new PC possibility, without worrying that this introduction will disrupt established continuity or result in an option that overshadows the Jedi.

In all, even in a seemingly cluttered campaign world, there are probably many possibilities for new factional additions that are still interesting and worthwhile, but manage to avoid being disruptive or moot. Like threading a needle, the trick is not to worry about the big piece that's already there, but to focus on the hole.

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Pyramid Review

Crime Scene: Feds (*for the d20 System*)

Published by [Hogshead Publishing](#)

Written by Ian Hunt

Cover by Shaun Thomas

Illustrated by David Esbri, Ursula Vernon, & Marcio Fiorito

80-page b&w softcover; \$18.95

The FBI has been common enough as a subject for magazine articles, especially for *Call of Cthulhu*, but considering its importance in US law enforcement and how often they turn up in modern-set campaigns, it is a surprise that no gaming supplement has been devoted to them. With the advent of the *d20 System* there are now two, of which one is an addition to Hogshead Publishing's range of law and crime source books for the here and now. ***Crime Scene: Feds*** details the FBI for the *d20 System* and is the sourcebook for federal law enforcement. Where [Crime Scene: Police Investigation](#) covers state and local law enforcement, [Crime Scene: Forensics](#) would be a useful companion, providing the technical details of crime detection, while the sourcebooks on the Mob and the Yakuza explore the bad guys. So while ***Crime Scene: Feds*** might not be the only *d20 System* sourcebook on the FBI, it is the best supported.

From the outset this supplement plays it straight. This is not a cinematic or fictional take upon the FBI like *The X-Files*. Instead this is very much a procedure book: who the FBI are, what its responsibilities are, how it works, and so on. This is presented in Hogshead's usual style as a well-read document. It is lightly illustrated, but is very text heavy. In fact, it is so text heavy that it does not suffer from Hogshead's usual repetitive use of its artwork. However, the layout and format of the book is inconsistent, which hinders the book's use. Another problem with what ***Crime Scene: Feds*** actually is -- a reference book -- is that the book lacks an index.

The book defines the role of the FBI, gives a short history, describes its organization, and its headquarters, the J. Edgar Hoover building in Washington DC. Perhaps the most interesting of these sections describes the FBI Academy at Quantico, the requirements for each applicant, and life at the Academy if successful. This continues with the exploration of life as an agent, covering apparel, relationships, discipline, and so on. All of this, along with the chapter on how the FBI gets involved in investigating a crime, is for the player's eyes as much as it is for the GM.

The actual roleplaying material in ***Crime Scene: Feds*** consists of the new character classes and associated feats and skills. These, as for other books in the series, are for ordinary *Dungeons & Dragons* rather than [d20 Modern](#). Each character is presumed to start the game as a Special Agent or Specialist Agent such as a Forensic Investigator or Negotiator. Characters receive several standard feats to model the extensive training in the use of cars and firearms at Quantico. To reflect the fact that FBI agents come from a wide variety of backgrounds from Counter Terrorism and Cyber Crime Division to Laboratory Division Specialist and Legal Specialist, a character also selects a Specialization. Each one gives a further feat and two additional class skills. This is perfectly reasonable and in some ways, makes a better job of detailing a character's previous experience than in other ***Crime Scene*** books, but still it feels muddled and in need of further development. But this problem is down to the supplement's choice of core system, *Dungeons & Dragons* not being designed for this, when *d20 Modern* is.

As to the classes themselves, they include the FBI Specialist, whose varied careers range from tracking down terrorists to handling legal matters; the Forensic Investigator, who works as part of the Evidence Response Team; the Ghost,

who is a surveillance expert; the Negotiator, who deals with situations where force would result in casualties, such as a hostage or siege scenario; the Point Man and Sniper classes, there to react if direct action is necessary; and finally, the Special Agent, what most people think of when they think of the FBI Agent. Overall, the changes are workable if dry, but that is the point. ***Crime Scene: Feds*** is more a procedural game than a shoot 'em up action flick.

Of the Feats and Skills, most of them have appeared before in other ***Crime Scene*** titles, particularly ***Crime Scene: Police Investigation*** and ***Forensics***. That said, each is well explained and summarized in the accompanying tables. The chapter on equipment focuses mainly on weapons and armor, and while vehicles are mentioned, no statistics are given for them. This is understandable as the book is written for ***Dungeons & Dragons*** and not for ***d20 Modern***, but since ***Dungeons & Dragons D*** includes no rules for handling car chases . . .

The information on how the FBI actually investigates a crime is useful for any investigative game. It details identifying and handling suspects, as well as informants. It covers telling how and when people are lying, the administering of the polygraph test, and the collection of evidence. This is all standard for any type of crime, but the other typical assignments for an agent are also covered -- surveillance, hostage situations, counter terrorism, and serial killer profiling. Not necessarily in all that much detail, but enough for most games.

The sample adventure "Watchers in the Shadows" is designed for three to six agents of first to third levels. It is a surveillance assignment on a suspected drug dealer that quickly acquires complications. A simple one- or two-session affair, it handily reinforces the procedural nature of the ***Crime Scene: Feds*** game. The book is rounded out with a pair of appendices. The first lists *some* of the common FBI terms, while the second lists the organization's field offices in the USA and the worldwide legal attaché offices.

Crime Scene: Feds is Hogshead's top selling title and it is not hard to see why. It is interesting and informative, useful for almost any modern set game. But it is let down by inconsistent layout and typography, under developed character background options, and the lack of an index. Actual advice for the GM on running an FBI game would also have been appreciated. That said, ***Crime Scene: Feds*** delivers what it sets out to do -- provide the source material necessary for a procedural game.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

UWO: Unidentified Walking Objects

Published by [Elven Ear Games](#)

Created & illustrated by Thomas Jansen

Designed by Bjorn Scholten

English translation by Jaklien Jansen

92 full-color cards & three rules sheets in three languages (English, Dutch, & German); \$10

The idea is a painfully basic one: The Gnorfs of Znorf find the Pnorfs purple and ugly, and gleefully attack them for their differences. The Pnorfs, for their part, hold the same beliefs about the green Gnorfs. The ***UWO: Unidentified Walking Objects***, using this rather thin but ancient justification, are ready to deliver a beat-down.

The object of the game is to eliminate all your opponent's forces.

Each player gets a deck of cards in his color. One player lays his six energy cards in a horizontal line in front of him, while the other lines his up adjacent to the end of that line going up the table vertically. This forms an L-shape, and the playing field is the 5 × 6 grid in the crook of that L. The two teams of 10 set up on either side, draw a hand of three cards, and march to engage each other. Movement depends on what kind of unit it is, though they all use more or less the same rules -- you can travel up and down, or side to side, though the cards have to stick to the invisible grid. (It's not a bad idea to get some sort of playing mat just to make sure you have an actual grid upon which to play -- the erasable one with squares you might see in a ***Dungeons & Dragons*** game works fine.)

Everyone starts out as a walker, ready to pummel his enemies with his bare fists. Using cards from your hand, you morf your units into other various troops with different offensive and defensive abilities. For example, if attacked by a walker, you could morf your unit into a bunker. Now you're protected against punchers and shooters and can attack at a greater distance, but you lose your movement value.

You can become a Pnorf (or Gnorf) in a tank, arm yourself with a grenade or bazooka, or give your life for the cause with a bundle of dynamite (taking out anyone in the eight spaces around you). You can also ride astride your Vlorf, though this unit can only stun opponents. If you're lucky enough with your card draws, you might simply be able to play a straight-up miss card and save yourself all that tedious rearming. Alas, miss your opponent and they get to return fire even though it isn't their turn. This back-and-forth continues until neither of you is willing to carry that fight another round, and the offense switches to your enemy.

All this activity isn't free; you have to use your energy cards to move or morf (even if you take no action on a turn, you still expend one energy so that the round will eventually end even without cards to play). Once your stash of six energy has been expended, you may no longer play anything but miss cards to withstand your enemy. Once you've both run out of power, the energy cards reset themselves and the conflict resumes anew. You can run out of cards, but the game doesn't end until you're out of opponents as well.

Whether it's because they didn't have an artist or they deliberately went for the cartoon look, the pictures aren't much to crow about. Like the cards on which they appear, they're utilitarian illustrations, geared more toward clear statistics. They are good stock, though.

In fact, the whole game is very practical -- straightforward rules, fast play, nothing flashy. It may be the same old game rules in trappings that are notable only because of their Spartan presentation, but it's fast-moving and fun. Neither player is going to overbear the other, dynamite-wielding suicide bombers notwithstanding. Requiring that everything be done by degrees means the rules hide many opportunities to turn the game around, pull a tactical surprise or two, or even (gasp) *think* about how to best kill a bushy-bodied foe.

The humor is slight and won't entertain long, its subtle Seussian edge aside, but the real value is how far under you can dig and still find new strategies you hadn't considered. The rules are a translation, so it's probably not much of a surprise that it takes a couple of readings to absorb the meaning (the Dutch and German versions are included as well). Part ***Stratego***, part ***Magic***, and a little part chess, ***UWO: Unidentified Walking Objects*** is a two-player game with depths and corners that must be investigated, and it holds the attention longer than another round of gin rummy.

--Andy Vetromile

Le Sorelle Stanno Facendolo Per Si

Convents of Renaissance Venice

by Matt Riggsby

Monasticism is one of the great Medieval phenomena. Through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, monasteries and convents sprang up across Christendom. Their position was paradoxical. On one hand, their purpose was to provide a place where the residents could be "in the world but not of it," devoting their lives to prayer and contemplation and leaving material concerns behind. On the other, they managed to acquire vast wealth and power from the gifts and bequests of wealthy people looking for a pious image for in life and a better deal in the afterlife, making them enormously important political and economic entities.

Monastic institutions for nuns put on an additional layer of contradiction. They were often little more than a genteel prison for their inmates, but within the constricted bounds of their spatial limits, they were about the only institution of the age which was run wholly by women. They had a particular social significance as well. They were the height of female respectability, and in some times and places they provided just about the only career a woman could consider outside of marriage. Any number of the daughters of the rich and powerful were educated in convents, and they could become a veritable dumping ground for politically inconvenient female relatives of deposed rulers and potential usurpers.

In Renaissance [Venice](#), convents reached the height of their use as a place for the high and mighty to put their daughters, for reasons which were as much economic as political and dynastic. This gave convents of the era a number of peculiar characteristics, and makes them surprisingly useful for gaming. Far from being scowling old math teachers dressed like penguins, the nuns of the Venetian Renaissance combined power, wealth, and secrecy, and if that's not good enough for at least one decent adventure, then you're just not trying.

The Social Background

Marriage was in decline among the upper classes in Venice by the early Renaissance. Noble households in the highly socially stratified city tried very hard not to marry off their sons to prevent political squabbles within the family and to avoid splitting family fortunes among a horde of grandchildren. Consequently, it became difficult for noble families to find suitable husbands for their daughters (a set of harsh inheritance laws effectively ruled out women marrying down the social ladder). When husbands could be had, simple supply and demand raised the price of a dowry to twice as much as a tradesman could make during his entire lifetime, so even a very rich family couldn't afford to marry off more than a few of its daughters.

This led to households where one or two married men might live with any number of bachelor brothers. They didn't have to be celibate, of course (society and the Church winked at the peccadilloes of wealthy men), so long as they didn't threaten the family fortune by getting married and having legitimate offspring. Women didn't have that option. The only thing an unmarried woman of high birth could do while remaining respectable was to become a nun.

The life of a nun combined the protection of female chastity, another high goal in most civilizations, with religious devotion, one of the most admired motivations of the age. Female spirituality, when it could be perfected, was particularly highly thought of by a number of theologians. Taken together, these factors made convents among the most highly esteemed spiritual institutions in Christendom. Venice was particularly proud of its 30-some-odd convents, which were

Fun Words to Learn and Say

There's an important point of terminology to be made here. In the Catholic tradition, a convent has two mutually exclusive classes of inmates: sisters and nuns. A sister, sometimes called a *converse*, takes a set of "simple" vows which leave her with a lower standing but more freedom to interact with the outside world. A nun, however, takes "solemn" vows and despite (or, indeed, because of) a higher standing is restricted to her convent (that is, she is "cloistered") with only extraordinary exceptions. In casual usage, the words "nun" and "sister" have become interchangeable, although technically most people have never met a nun, even if they've

recipients of countless gifts and bequests. No matter how venal and corrupt they themselves might be, Venetians could point to their support of the convents as evidence of their piety. Many widows hoped to become nuns after their husbands died, although increasingly few were allowed to during the later Middle Ages and Renaissance, and many women wanted to be buried in a nun's habit when they died. And as the Catholic Church scrambled to shore up its respectability during the Counter-Reformation, convents became all the more spiritually important.

gone to a Catholic school. We'll accept common usage, but when a specific type of convent inmate is intended, we'll be referring to *converse* sisters and cloistered nuns.

In the convent, segregated from the outside world, the nuns would cast off their old concerns in favor of building a religious community. They would leave behind old attachments, hold goods in common, eat the same food from the same dishes, wear clothes drawn from a common store, and in all ways submit their will to the communal life.

That's the theory, anyway. In practice, despite policies by the church to prevent girls from being forced into convents, some women entered the convent literally kicking and screaming. Many more went quietly, obedient to their family's wishes, but just as unwillingly in their hearts. Instead of forming a community of devotion to which they had no wish to belong, they brought their old desires, priorities, and loyalties into the convent with them.

And as for the idea of the nuns leaving all previous social attachments and distinctions behind, it should surprise no one to learn that some nuns were more equal than others. The converse sisters made up a sort of working class. They were charged with doing most of the day-to-day menial labor and had little if any power to elect convent officials and participate in internal decision-making. Above them were the cloistered nuns. Not only were they required to do little work (or, if they did work, assume supervisory positions) -- ostensibly so that they could spend their time in purely meditative, spiritual pursuits -- they were also the decision-makers within the convent, electing the leaders who would set and enforce local rules, assign tasks to individual nuns, and decide how to spend the convent's sometimes considerable income.

The distinction was underlined by the fact that entering a convent wasn't free. Though it was nowhere near as expensive as a wedding, families would spend several times a tradesman's salary to establish their daughters' places as cloistered nuns, ensuring that Venetian convents would be filled primarily by the daughters of the wealthy and middle classes. Well over half of every convent's cloistered nuns were members of noble families, who could best afford to spend enough money to guarantee that their daughters would never have to work. In a few convents, *all* of the cloistered nuns were from noble families (conversely, it became nearly impossible to find candidates for a special magistracy overseeing convents because the magistrate had to be a nobleman with no close female relatives in a convent; by the 1550s, few if any noblemen didn't have at least one sister or first cousin who was a nun). Becoming a converse sister was less expensive but, again, not free, so most of the lower ranks came from the middle classes.

Convent Life

On a day-to-day basis, the life of a cloistered nun was probably much like it would have been outside the convent: directing at least part of a large domestic establishment, in this case, converse sisters and part of the convent's operations rather than servants and younger relatives in her own home. However, it was with no babies, no chance of ever leaving the building, and religious devotions at least theoretically taking up a great deal of time. Nevertheless, cooking, cleaning, household accounting, and the like would be much the same inside or outside the cloister.

The other obvious difference is that men had a minimal role in decisions. Priests might be the final authority on spiritual

True Believers

This is not to say that all nuns were entirely opposed to a religious life. After all, there was a certain spiritual glamour in being a nun, albeit one which seemed to appeal more to older women looking for a comfortable retirement than young ones with their whole lives ahead of them. Some of the young women involved may very well have thought that entering a convent was a preferable alternative to getting married, living a life which was freer only by comparison, and quite possibly dying painfully in childbirth. Some of the nuns were as devoutly religious as one could hope. Or, indeed, even more so. One nun, fed up with the laxity of her convent, escaped from her convent, disguised herself as a man, and tried to infiltrate a monastery on the mainland so she could lead what she regarded as a *truly* religious lifestyle.

matters (and some clearly did abuse that authority to extort favors from the nuns) and the Patriarch, Venice's bishop, might issue general policy guidelines, but the abbess's word was, generally speaking, final, and decisions about what tasks to perform and who should do them were made inside the convent with little or no outside intervention. The convent lifestyle, which encouraged religious reading and gave precious little else to do, probably also led to women who both read and wrote more than usual even for their high level of status. A few even took the opportunity to compose tracts condemning the treatment of women. They were a far cry from modern feminism, of course, but they do amply demonstrate that a number of nuns were unhappy not with being nuns, but with being so limited in their choices relative to their brothers.

The movements of the cloistered nuns were always highly restricted, and what few opportunities they had to even see or hear the outside world were slowly curtailed through the years of the Counter-Reformation as possible avenues of contact were sealed off. During the Renaissance, business affairs were put in the hands of agents living outside the convent, and only a few older converse sisters (who were thought better equipped to resist temptation) might be allowed to leave in order to visit the markets. Under extraordinary circumstances, nuns might be summoned to give testimony on important affairs to high officials.

Usually, traffic usually went the other way, with outsiders coming to the convent. For example, priests visited convents several times a week to celebrate Mass, and other officials might visit convents for special events and particular errands (for example, the operation of convents was examined every decade or so). Other women might come to live at the convent temporarily. Girls might be boarded at convents from just past toddler-hood into their early twenties to receive an education, and abused wives could find temporary shelter there. And, of course, necessity might require tradesmen to visit the convent to repair leaking roofs, clean out chimneys, and perform other necessary construction and maintenance. Such tradesmen would have to obtain special permission from the bishop.

And while only a few categories of people could enter the enclosed area of the convent, nuns could still receive visitors after a fashion, although they would be physically separated from their guests. They would come to a visiting parlor specially constructed so that visitors and inmates could speak to each other but be in physically separated parts of the room.

Theoretically, access to a convent's visiting parlor was restricted in order to limit nuns' contact with the outside world, with only related women (nuns' sisters, mothers, nieces, and a variety of cousins) and more closely related men (mostly fathers, brothers, and nephews) allowed to enter. In practice, though, this wasn't much of a restriction. Every member of the upper classes had relations at any number of convents, giving them fairly free admission. Moreover, visitors often brought their own friends and relatives, and even people completely unrelated to the residents of a convent might happen by from time to time. Prostitutes, for some reason, seemed to particularly enjoy dropping by to chat with the nuns. Since they lived diametrically opposite lives, they probably had a great deal to talk about.

Hungry for contact with the outside, the nuns themselves subtly encouraged visitors by making and giving away sizable quantities of cakes and other baked goods. Any welcome visitor could be assured of at least a good snack. Indeed, the production of baked treats became a major expenditure and a serious point of contention with the authorities charged with overseeing the behavior of the nuns. In the eyes of the authorities, excessive gift-giving, though excused by the nuns as charity and hospitality, invited excessive contact with the world.

Even though extensive measures were taken to separate nuns from the outside world, the unenthusiastically religious women of the Venetian convents had little reason to accept the restrictions placed on them. Most of the upper class women pushed into the convents had no interest in the ascetic life they were supposed to take up. Instead, they tried as best they could to lead a "normal" life.

One of the more obvious ways they did so was to indulge their taste for fine things. Still financed by their families, upper-class nuns continued to wear silk, high-heeled shoes, golden ornaments, and the other trappings of wealth. They would furnish their cells with tapestries, fine furniture, and paintings. Far from wearing the same habits, one could tell at a glance what the station of a nun was.

Although the tastes of upper-class nuns alarmed church officials, it didn't do so nearly as much as their determination to carry on "normal" relationships as well. Again, casting aside the idea of living a common life with their co-inmates, nuns would maintain relations with their families on the outside, form countless cliques with relatives (most nuns could find at

least one aunt or cousin among the other sisters), and make particular friendships within the convent. These cliques extended family rivalries across the supposedly inviolable walls of the convent. Just as noble families vied for political and economic power in the Senate and markets of the city, they maneuvered for control of the convents as well. Nuns would eat with their friends and relatives in their cells, exchange gifts within their cliques, and most importantly support one another in the convent's internal business. A family or group of allied families could come to dominate a convent if it had enough senior members there.

Many nuns even tried to establish romantic relationships. Some would engage in opportunistic affairs, taking lovers from among the men who were required to visit from time to time. Others were able to establish long-term relationships with more regular visitors. Unauthorized visitors managed to slip into the convents at night by a variety of clever strategies; at one convent, a pair of nuns dug a hole through a storeroom wall to admit their lovers. There is evidence to suggest that a number of nuns' relationships may not have had a sexual component but otherwise followed the model of regular marital relationships in the outside world: the man would provide various material goods for the woman (food, cloth, etc.), who in turn would provide domestic services such as cooking and sewing, and each provided the other with compassionate companionship. On their infrequent investigations into the convents, religious officials frequently chastised some nuns for sharing their cells or even beds with particular favorites, although since it wasn't unusual for siblings and cousins to share a bed even at the upper levels of society, romantic relationships within the convent may not have been quite as common as a modern observer might suppose at first.

A few nuns even tried to escape. Disguises, bribes, concealment in containers, and other ruses were used to get outside the walls and attempt some sort of normal life. The prospects for an escaped nun weren't actually very good. She would essentially have to exile herself, leaving behind her city and her family or else risk being returned to the convent. She might end up as a prostitute or a peasant's or itinerant tradesman's wife, a far cry from the aristocratic setting of her youth. For some, though, the chance to behind a life of comfort but little freedom for the opposite was worth it.

The Physical Convent

Venetian convents usually held between 50 and 100 residents. Unlike rural convents and monasteries, which could be something like a complete small town with a wall thrown around it, limited land inside the city meant that the convents couldn't have large gardens or mostly single-story buildings.

The idea of a habitation isolated from the outside world was also more difficult to pull off in the city, where the population density was orders of magnitude greater than in the countryside. Large homes, palaces, and other places where people both live and work are often divided into public and private areas. Convents could be said to have semi-private and very private areas.

The most notable public area was usually a church. Obviously, the nuns had to have a place where they could hear Mass and take communion. However, depending on the architecture of their convent, nuns might not physically enter the churches where they worshiped. Rather, they might attend ceremonies in barred galleries or balconies overlooking the church proper. The priest might communicate with sisters through a *ruota*, a revolving drum with one open side, set into a wall. Items might be placed into the open side and the drum rotated so that someone on the other side might pick it up. Similar devices are used today in some highly secured post offices, cash cages in casinos, pharmacies stocking particularly powerful drugs, and other facilities where parcels need to be passed over the counter but people on one side need to be protected from the other.

Convents also had semi-public parlors where the areas for nuns and visitors were divided by heavily barred grills. The parlors were large enough that the nuns could attend, or at least observe, family gatherings. Some were quite elaborately formal. For example, it became customary for wealthy brides to take a flotilla of gondolas around the city, visiting the convents to see aunts and sisters (any woman rich enough to be able to afford such a procession also had female relations who were nuns). Others, though, could be quite raucous, even vulgar. At various times, special police were designated to arrest people visiting convents without proper permission.

The other parts of the convent are quite sealed off from the outside world. Convents were never easy to get into, and it got harder through the Renaissance. To better "protect" the nuns, almost all outward-facing doors and windows in Venetian convents were ordered sealed, typically leaving one gate on the land and one on the water, so that nuns couldn't

see out of the convent and no one could see in.

The nuns live in small, individual cells. More senior nuns would, of course, have the pick of larger and more comfortable rooms. It was also common for a convent to have a cloister, a courtyard surrounded by a shaded walkway. Otherwise, the convent might closely resemble a large household. It would have kitchens, store rooms, a refectory for common meals, and other facilities for everyday living.

The maps are of an imaginary but reasonably representative convent. It would be one of the larger and more comfortable convents in the city, capable of housing nearly 100 residents. A church is attached to one side, with a ruota and a grated gallery near the altar through which the nuns can watch (convenient for taking communion) and a second-story choir loft accessible from the living area. There is, however, no direct entry into the church from the convent. The opposite side of the convent contains a small garden courtyard, an entrance to the convent proper (usually locked and barred, with a ruota in place to accept small deliveries) and the parlor. Grated areas on one side of the parlor allows nuns to communicate with visitors. The parlor also has one of two doors from the outside into the convent, flanked by a ruota; it is typically guarded by an older converse sister.

The interior of the convent contains not one but two cloisters around which the cells are arranged, connected by a tall, arched passageway. One is paved and contains a well, the other contains a garden. Some of the cells are double-sized and are the preferred rooms of the senior and wealthier nuns. The larger cloister is purely residential, while the smaller provides access to the laundry, some storage rooms, and the kitchens, which also communicate with the refectory. The refectory has a balcony around the second floor level, from which sisters might be assigned to read from the Bible or other religious works during meals. The storage rooms are next to the rear gate, which faces a canal for water-borne deliveries and visitors. There are no outside-facing windows on the first floor, but there are a few narrow windows high on the walls of the taller rooms, such as the store rooms and refectory. They provide light and ventilation, but it's unlikely that anyone would be able to look either in or out.

1st Floor

2nd Floor

Map Key

- A. Store rooms
- B. Canal gate
- C. Kitchen
- D. Laundry
- E. Refectory
- F. Cells
- G. Garden cloister
- H. Parlor
- I. Paved cloister
- J. Entry courtyard
- K. Front gate
- L. Church
- M. Nuns' choir
- N. Bell Tower
- O. Stairs
- P. Nuns' Gallery

Gaming with Nuns

Admittedly, an adventuring nun is pretty much a contradiction in terms, so they aren't suitable for PCs in conventional historical campaigns. However, just because one doesn't imagine nuns running around the landscape and whacking things with broadswords doesn't mean that they can't be used in adventures. A convent could easily be the object of PC attention. For example, between expensive religious paraphernalia (gold crucifixes, jeweled reliquaries, etc.) and the personal possessions of wealthy nuns, a convent might be a tempting target for thieves. The difficult part would be disposing of the readily identifiable goods; being identified at the people who robbed a convent would *not* make characters particularly popular. Similarly, PCs might try to get a nun out of her convent. She might be the lover of someone with money, hoping to join him for a normal life outside the convent, or the subject of a kidnapping plot by her family's enemies. Warriors might have an interesting challenge with the task of defending a convent during an attack. The inmates might not be able or willing to leave the convent even in the face of invasion, and defenders might be unable to enter the convent they are defending. In a fantasy campaign, convents might be secret storehouses of powerful holy items, and their spiritual importance might be a result of real spiritual power. Nuns wouldn't just be an important symbol; their virtue might be a defense against diabolical magic.

But it could be far more interesting to involve the inmates of the convent as active participants in adventures. Remember, the women in question here are connected to some of the wealthiest, most powerful families of their day, hidden away from their society and even, quite often, from their own religious supervisors, and are connected to, if not always completely devoted to, a strong mystical tradition. They're well-funded and influential, which gives them a certain latitude to think independently, they have a lot of time unobserved, which means that they could be up to pretty much anything, and many of them have a motive to rebel. Here are some more specific ideas:

The Italian Job: A convent would be a marvelous depot for smuggling small quantities of stolen and forbidden goods. Its status as a religious institution would put it almost above reproach (although during the Counter-Reformation there's increased pressure). Moreover, the prohibition on entering a convent would make it nearly impossible for authorities to obtain permission to search the premises. At the very least, getting that permission would be a time-consuming process which would become public knowledge well before anyone from the outside could come in, giving smugglers ample time to move their goods.

Locked Room: The same isolation that makes a convent an interesting front for a smuggling operation makes it an interesting venue for a murder mystery. If a nun is killed, the close quarters and lack of privacy would make it fairly easy to determine whether or not any outsiders were around and who was where when. However, investigators would have a very difficult time examining the scene of the crime (a generous GM might grant PCs the aid of a Renaissance Nancy Drew or an Archie Goodwin in a wimple) and would have both religious and political authorities breathing down their necks at every turn. Did someone infiltrate the convent? Did a family feud strike into what should have been a sanctuary? Did it have something to do with the convent's internal politics? Was it all of the above?

(Secret) High Society: A convent is a secret society. That is, people may know that it exists, but its day to day operations are a mystery to anyone who isn't a member. Important parts of the Venetian government, like the Council of Ten, were already essentially secret societies by that definition, so why not one more? Banking on their spiritual authority and ties to important families, the female-run convents could constitute a shadow government in parallel to the male-run Senate and Doge, constituting a power well behind the throne (with a few other intermediate powers in the way, no doubt).

And it could go beyond Venice. Historically, convents didn't belong to centrally administered, nation- and continent-spanning orders like the Templars. After all, it becomes exceedingly difficult to run an international organization if anyone in a position of authority *ipso facto* can't visit her parents across the street, let alone another city or country. However, a secret network of couriers (the Venetian nobility aren't just rich and powerful; they're well-traveled merchants with regular contacts across the Mediterranean and into Europe) could quietly coordinate activities of convents across wide regions, subtly pulling the strings of kings and bishops.

Mater Noster: One of the myths occasionally encountered about the Middle Ages is that full-blown paganism was still rife, but was only practiced in hiding, usually by women who were burned as witches when they were found out. It's a proposition blissfully unencumbered by evidence, but it could be interesting to make it true in a place allegedly at the heart of Christendom. A convent may appear to be as Catholic as the pope, but when the priests leave, the crucifixes are taken down and images of Astarte, Magna Mater, Diana, and other goddesses are brought out. If not an ancient survival, it could be a revival of ancient cults in the wake of the revival of classical learning and a radical assertion of Venice's

ecclesiastical semi-independence from Rome. It would cause a tremendous scandal if it were found out, and the papacy would come down on Venice like several tons of particularly hard bricks. Which, of course, would be all the more reason for not just the convents but the entire city government to make sure the secret never got out.

In addition to the layers of secrecy and deception present in the other scenarios, this provides a good excuse to bring in powerful magic. The same walls that could mask graven images could hide blood sacrifice and sorcery just as easily. One woman's convent could be another's coven, or even, given a lack of windows, a nest of vampires.

The Blade of Zorra: About the last thing one would expect is a swashbuckling nun, which makes it a tempting proposition. One can imagine a girl whose progressive, idealistic father educated her in swordplay before she entered the convent. Now, she slips out of the convent at night and, in disguise (remember, this is Venice; masks abound), fights injustice and the despotic rule of the Council of Ten. Or there might be a convent run by an entire order of fighting nuns ("martial sisters" might sound better than "Venetian ninja nuns"). The members of the convent receive secret but intensive training in all manner of combat and stealth techniques. This could easily come to resemble *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, only with predominantly women as Watchers rather than mostly men. The question then becomes who they fight for. Are they secret assassins for the papacy? For the Doge and the Council of Ten? Or are they autonomous, following a secret agenda even the church doesn't know about?

Further Reading

- Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Renaissance Venice*
- Mary Laven, *Virgins of Venice*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Getting into the Game

In Nomine Neural Interfaces and What You Can Do With Them

by Elizabeth McCoy

Herein are a collection of specific-use advantages for a "modern day" setting. (In a Cyberpunk setting, some will be standard, and others could cost more points, at the GM's option.) They are priced and named for for ***In Nomine***; for ***GURPS In Nomine***, the quick and dirty conversion rounds each cost up to the nearest 5. (For GMs thinking the prices are too expensive for what is really flash and mirrors, halve the prices and introduce the concept of half-points to ***In Nomine***.) The concepts behind the names should be easily portable to any similar setting, such as ***GURPS IOU***; thus *Friends in Lightning*, below, could become "Friends in WUSE" at IOU or "Friends in the Technocracy" in a light-hearted *World of Darkness* campaign . . .

Friends in Lightning/Technology (5 points)

You know people in the organization. In particular, you know who gives the toys, and you know the mailing lists and forums wherein all knowledge is contained. This effectively gives you a +5 bonus to research *anything* -- but at a cost in time. Each question you ask using this advantage will take 7 days, minus check digit, to get answered to your satisfaction. (There is also a chance the GM will rule the question is simply not answerable at all, which will turn up a lot of complaining about the lack of data and speculation on it, or that it's so complex as to have contradictory information available.)

Friends in Lightning/Technology is required before purchasing any of the below advantages, even if the character is a Servitor of Lightning or Technology.

Neural Interface (5 points)

This is, quite frankly, forbidden technology in the ***In Nomine*** setting. Vapula, Prince of Technology, doesn't much care so long as the Servitor does not lose it. The Archangel of Lightning, Jean, minds a great deal more -- either the character will need his trust (in the form of a Distinction), or be *very* careful not to get caught. One good way to avoid losing the toys is to use them only at Tethers. Another is to also purchase them as corporeal artifacts and add the Summonable Feature to them. (This adds 5 points to the cost: 1 to make it an artifact and 4 to make it Summonable for 1 Essence. Other Features may be taken to reduce the price -- or add to it.)

A Neural Interface allows hands-free use of a properly equipped computer -- it will need Firewire, USB, or some other form of input, and an appropriate connector for the Neural Interface. (The connectors are much less forbidden; there are adaptor plugs easily available.) The Neural Interface reduces the time to do *anything* on the computer by the user's Ethereal Forces in time units, with a minimum of 1/2 of the time units. (E.g., if a task would take 10 minutes, a celestial with 4 Ethereal Forces and a Neural Interface will take 6 minutes. If a task would take 1 hour, that celestial could do it in half an a hour.)

Neural Interfaces are also used with computer games, granting faster reaction times and the ability to look around in a more normal way; this typically grants a bonus equal to the player's Ethereal Forces. They are *especially* used with Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), to the point where rumor has it that both Archangel and Prince are considering leaking information to the humans just so their Servitors will be less easy to identify when playing their favorite MMORPGs.

There are also rumors that the Media has its own independently researched (and/or stolen) Neural Interface technology, and Nybbas, the Prince of the Media, is unlikely to worry overmuch about leaking it to humans.

Most users of a Neural Interface are sensible enough not to program actual *pain*. Sensations of cold, tingling, or visual overlays are all favored means of indicating something dangerous to the online avatar. Some Vapulans (especially Habbalah) are either less sensible or more sadistic, and damage perceived with their Neural Interfaces will feel painful and possibly cause Mind Hits. (This might include an electric shock any time you make a typo in a text application; beware borrowing someone else's Interface!)

A Neural Interface is recommended for purchasing any of the abilities below, as the code for each can be downloaded into the Neural Interface itself instead of hacking each application separately.

Resonance Over Live MMORPG-Media (3 or 5 points)

Usually, the shielding of avatar and avatar reduces the check digits drastically (*In Nomine*, p. 57, or IN140; visual reproduction) and makes the resonances of Cherubim and Djinn useless; further, GMs may entirely forbid certain resonance abilities (such as those of Kyriotates, Shedim, Lilim and Balseraphs who don't work for the Media). With the 3-point version of this advantage, all penalties for using resonance live within a MMORPG are reduced to a -1 to check digit, *and* virtual distance counts. (So one can get a bonus for being close to someone's character, or have a penalty for being far away.) With the 5-point version, all resonances work normally, *including* that of Cherubim, Djinn, Kyriotates, and Shedim!

Within the game, a Cherub or Djinn's tracking resonance is for the online *character*, not its player, and a careless Cherub may gain dissonance for allowing his attuned to suffer character death! (A logged-off character is in no danger, and that severs the attunement painlessly if the character and the Cherub's character are not logged on at the same time for days equal to the tracker's Celestial Forces.) A more sensible Cherub will find out whether *items* are damaged, and attune to that, instead -- with the drawback that even an item bound to a character by code can usually be left in a bank.

Kyriotates and Shedim will be able to possess avatars, not players. (The affected player sees symptoms of his character being charmed, or intermittently charmed in the case of Shedim, depending on how much control the Shedite is exerting.) Their own avatars vanish for the duration, effectively logged out. If they lose their host somehow, they will be bounced to their character log-in screen and may return to the game at wherever they left their original character.

Other resonances will be warped appropriately by the setting (a Lilim sensing Needs may find a *World of Warcraft* character's quest list, with gray quests on a check digit 1, and red ones on a check digit 6), and the GM may rule that the 3-point version of the advantage will terminate any long-term resonance effects if the character is logged off. Habbalah beware.

Ethereal Songs on Computer RPGs (varies from 1 to 3 points)

The 1-point advantage, bought separately for each Ethereal Song the character knows and wishes to be able to use online, hacks the system to permit the performance of a Song. It does not cost Essence, but will exact a price (mana, fatigue, energy, or simply a "cool down" period before it can be used again). It does not affect players, only characters (PCs or NPCs). The celestial uses his own target number, as if performing the Song normally, and while there is no disturbance if no Essence is spent, there *will* be game-specific SFX to indicate the performance and effects!

For another point, the Song *will* affect the player . . . *if* that player is also using a Neural Interface! It can be very dangerous when MMORPG guilds of angels and demons battle.

For two points, the Song does *not* need to be known by the character! It is simply downloaded and linked to a command of some sort, and will have a fixed success rate based on the character's level, like any other special ability in the game. While the celestial cannot learn a Song this way, a downloaded Song *can* be bought (for a total of 3 points) so that it will affect others with Neural Interfaces.

Celestial and Corporeal Songs on Computer RPGs (+1 point)

As above, but for Celestial and Corporeal Songs, adding an additional +1 for whichever Song is being used. (The GM is entitled to rule that hits of damage done by *any* online Song are always Mind hits, though.) As usual, this is for the game-world, using game-world values for "distance." It will be difficult or impossible to use the Celestial Song of Motion to teleport from the *EverQuest* moon of Luclin to the planet "visible" in the sky above Shadeweaver's Thicket - but you could get from one end of a zone to another with a high roll, or between nearby zones.

Attunements in Computer RPGs (1 or 3 points)

The celestial, or someone with the same Band, Choir, or Servitor attunement, will have to consent (or have consented in the past) to having his attunement studied in the appropriate realm(s) by the appropriate Servitors in the organization, so that the abilities can be coded into the Neural Interface database. Once this is done, it costs 1 point per attunement which can be used in the computer games and will affect the characters and environment therein, or 3 points if it will affect a player who is also using a Neural Interface.

Some Superiors will not approve of their Servitors allowing attunements to be studied, and some attunements (such as the Game's Humanity) may be too specialized to bother with online.

(The same procedure may also work with ethereal affinities! Or, in other systems, psionic powers that normally work only in the physical world.)

Celestial Form in Computer RPGs (1 to 4 points)

The celestial may spend appropriate in-game energies to assume *a* celestial form, chosen when the advantage is bought -- and it can be bought multiple times! Emote (or Acting) can be used to simulate appropriate Choir or Band mannerisms, and an Artistry roll (probably for CGI or Painting) should be made for the *programmer* who was trying to make an image of someone from the other side, or trying to genericize a non-humanoid "photograph." (I.e., it's easy enough to make a humanoid character have appropriate wings; if you want to make Sydney the Seraph not immediately recognizable to those who've seen it in celestial form, you'll need to modify the image.) Detect Lies can be used to try to sort out whether Joecracker is really a Mercurian, or a Calabite trying to fake it -- or vice versa; it takes observation and possibly conversation.

Each celestial form for the Choirs and Bands *other* than Shedim and Kyriotates costs 1 point. It conveys all the usual corporeal advantages in the game environment -- it can pass through "solid" objects, fly, function without breath underwater, is hard to see, etc. Zone boundaries may be ignored until the code stops producing visual results -- the celestial may then either go into the blackness forever, with the image shrinking behind him, or will be stopped by an invisible wall.

Kyriotates and Shedim who wish to stun human-run characters (i.e., those not using a neural interface) in the game -- or anyone purchasing their forms! -- pay 3 points. This *will* stun any human *players* using a Neural Interface!

Most programmers of celestial forms have a sense of humor and will enact the usual time limit for being celestial. Being able to be indefinitely celestial in the computer game costs another point (to symbolize cutting through the technobabble about how it's not psychologically good to remain in faux-celestial form overlong).

Artifacts in Computer RPGs (1 to 3 points)

As with attunements, any artifact which can be studied can be coded into a Neural Interface. Talismans for a given MMORPG or other computer game do *not* need to have any additional points or coding spent on them! Reliquaries will provide additional energy of the appropriate sort. All items that the Neural Interface provides will take up inventory spaces! While a Summonable artifact won't take up inventory slots when it's not manifested, you will need somewhere to put it when it is.

For an additional point, the artifact will be summonable within the game, whether it's summonable outside it or not.

(Summoning an item always has some minor SFX in lieu of disturbance.)

And, as with attunements and Songs, an additional point makes the item effective against others with Neural Interfaces.

Invocation of Superiors Online (1 point)

This is very cheap, but also very risky. There are very, *very* few times you want your Superior to appear next to your online avatar, and just because the dragons have nearly wiped your party is not one of them. However, if you find yourself facing Michael or Baal, via *their* Neural Interfaces, you might want to get your Prince or Archangel to help you log off quickly.

Other Applications

While all of the above abilities are primarily useful on computer RPGs and MMORPGs, the player can try to make a case for one being applicable to web-surfing, text editing, or web-page designing. If it won't be too game-breaking, the GM is encouraged to let the player sink points into the ability. Remember, NPCs can buy the ability too!

Consequences and Adventure Seeds

If there are groups who will study and program supernatural abilities . . . there are groups who will use them. Whether solitary agents on a server or guild, or entire guilds open only to celestials (or ethereals?) and their mortal minions . . . that high-level Paladin helping you with a quest may have green horns, and you might find yourself leaving your own raid to help her track down a dragon . . .

Groups of celestials may battle each other in more seriousness than anyone guesses, with Songs that will strike to the opponent's true mind -- or the angels of Lightning might join a PvP server to show those Michaelites a thing or two about tactics, with no lasting harm done to anything but someone's pride.

Naturally, there's also the issue of keeping the War secret from the programmers, online GMs, and other administrators who might notice characters doing things that their class, species, or type should be unable to do. It's considered very bad form to require some Vapulan Shedite or Lightning Kyriotate to track down and eliminate the evidence of a Warrior "casting a spell" that "charmed" another character. (Nonetheless, some celestials have favorable opinions about turning MMORPG admins into Soldiers or Servants.)

Light-hearted campaigns might be entirely online! More seriously, the PCs could be trying to track down a Soldier via his mundane child's online hints, or stopping a cyberstalker from claiming another victim -- especially if the stalker is a Djinn of Death, promising the eternal unlife of a mummy.

Darkly, addictive Neural Interfaces may have been leaked into humanity. Angels will want to stop this -- unless they did the leaking. Could Jordi have helped sow these seeds of humanity's self-destruction? Has Jean gone mad? Is this *In Nomine* backwards, with demons trying to stop Heaven from reducing mortals to vacant sheep?

In more normal settings, Servitors of Lightning will try to stop Technology from letting Neural Interface technology into the mainstream, especially when it has the supernatural additions. If they've reached a tentative agreement on this (if only because it would dislodge the Vapulans as the uber-guilds on the MMORPGs), they may find themselves banding together as a rogue group of Nybbytes seeks to get more people to tune into their underground rated-X servers, or as a canny lot of Lust Servitors promise neural interfaces will make *any* online game a place to take one's pleasure without consequence or caring, running down and ravishing an opponent as easily as firebolting them from the shadows.

Build a Better Wand in Seven Days

Options for enchanters in *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by C. Lee Davis & Anna M. Short

Legolin barged into the laboratory, nearly knocking a carelessly stacked pile of scrolls into an oil lamp in his haste. "Anthrass! Have you heard? Kelen's been attacked! The city's under siege!" Anthrass glanced up and noticed that his friend was already in his riding leathers. "It's the dragon riders, just as the prophecy said!"

"And you want to ride to the rescue." The irritation in Anthrass' voice was evident. "Fine. You go ahead."

"You're not coming?" Anthrass was no coward, Legolin knew from experience.

The wizard stopped for a breath and looked up at his friend. "I've been working on this staff for two and a half years, ever since we first heard about the prophecy of the dragon riders. I'll be done in another two months. Do you know why I'm not finished now? I'll tell you why. Because two years ago, you talked me into going to Kelen to try to prevent the prophecy. Not only did that not work, not only did it set me back two months on making a weapon that can kill dragons, but the good citizens of Kelen decided to burn me for a demon sorcerer. So, no, I'm not coming. I'm going to stay right here and finish this one enchantment, and if we're lucky, by the time they're done sacking Kelen, we'll have something that will work against them instead of just valiant optimism."

Legolin stood back, shocked by his friend's outburst. "Now go, shoo," Anthrass added. "Don't get killed. But leave me to my work. I'll join you in two months."

* * *

Enchantment in the standard **GURPS** model can be highly problematic for a player character. Without access to a large circle of mages of equal or greater power, which GMs may be reluctant to allow, a mage will require years to enchant a magic item, and even then the result will most likely be at best equal to the abilities he already possesses. In order to do this, he must drop out of play for game years; if the campaign can't wait, his skill as an enchanter is meaningless. If Magery is rare in the campaign, the time required may destroy all logical incentive for even NPC mages to create magic items -- why spend years on a wand of fireballs when he's arguably better off just casting the spell himself?

GURPS Magic and **GURPS Fantasy** offer advice to GMs attempting to reduce the number of magic items in their campaigns, but none to those who want to enable player character enchantment without unbalancing the game. Just like an alchemist, an enchanter can be a distinct magical archetype and as playable in a fantasy setting as is a gadgeteer in a high-tech world.

Assumptions in **GURPS**

GURPS Magic sets all costs of enchantment based on the assumption that an enchanter works 22 eight-hour days a month and has Average wealth. From that, it derives costs for items created using Slow & Sure and Quick & Dirty enchantment. **GURPS Magic** also assumes that would-be enchanters have access to circles of mages with Magery 2 and any spells to be enchanted at 15 or better, and that the enchanter himself has the applicable spells in the neighborhood of 20, so that he can lead the circle.

GURPS also assumes that it is often easier to teach a spell than to make an item. At most, it takes (400 hours × number of prerequisites) to learn any particular spell. With the standard restrictions on **GURPS** enchantment, the student not only ends up with access to the spell in less time, but learns all its prerequisites as well, and, unlike a magic item, his learning cannot be stolen. High mana worlds, where anyone can learn spells, elevate teaching over

enchantment even further.

For example, Fireball (4 prerequisites) takes 200 man-days to learn ($4 \times 400/8$), or 800 mage-days to enchant. The only reasons, under standard **GURPS** enchantment, to make a wand of fireballs are to exploit other enchantments, such as Speed or Power, or to use dedicated powerstones. Otherwise, it is simply faster and cheaper to teach the spell; the student gains the additional benefits of knowing Shape Fire, Create Fire, and Ignite Fire.

These assumptions do not fit many fantasy worlds. Mages may be wealthy and powerful, especially if Magery is rare. In such a setting, if the GM still wants magic items to be created for reasons other than to add Speed, Power, or dedicated Powerstones, he needs to make some changes to the material in **GURPS Magic**. These changes must address both the enchantment process and the wealth of enchanters, since the two are integrally related.

Speeding Up Slow & Sure Enchantment

The **Basic Set** sets the rate of Slow & Sure enchantment at 1 point of energy per day. Tinkering with that rate has a dramatic effect on how quickly enchanters can work, and therefore on how playable they are as characters; it can also be used to promote the creation of particular types of items by changing the tradeoffs for low-energy vs. high-energy spells, multiple enchantments on one item vs. enchanting multiple items, and so forth.

Each option includes a suggested minimum Wealth level for enchanters, to keep the cost of magic items about the same as it is in the **GURPS Magic** system. Increasing the enchanter's income will also raise the price he can charge for items created using the Quick & Dirty method; the same amount of his time is simply more valuable.

Fast Enchantment

Hours required = energy

A simple change is to allow Slow & Sure enchantment to enchant at a rate of one point of energy per hour, rather than per day. This makes enchantment much more competitive with teaching without introducing any additional, complicated calculations. Medium-sized projects may still take mage-years to complete, but lesser items will be achievable in a few weeks.

Suggested Wealth: Very Wealthy.

High-Powered, Multi-Function Items

Days required = the square root of total energy required

If the setting suggests that enchanters create few items, but those items have a wide range of capabilities, this function will support it. The incremental cost of each additional enchantment grows lower as more are put on the same item.

Using this option strongly suggests making all skill rolls on Enchant skill instead of the lower of Enchant or spell skill (see "The Power of Enchantment," below), since otherwise figuring out what enchantment took how long can be complicated. If the GM prefers, though, he can allocate the resulting time in proportion to the energy required.

Suggested Wealth: Very Wealthy.

High-Powered, Single-Function Items

Days required = the square root of the energy required for each spell

This calculation doesn't encourage multi-function items, but powerful items will not take so much more time than less powerful ones.

Suggested Wealth: Wealthy.

Skilled Enchanters

$$\text{Energy per day} = \text{Enchant}/10$$

Master enchanters will be able to produce magic items much more quickly than their less-skilled counterparts. To enhance the effect, use Enchant² instead of just Enchant; someone with Enchant-15 will be barely half as fast as someone with Enchant-20. To enhance the effects of tools, mana levels, or other factors, use effective skill instead of raw skill. Be careful with combining this with "Power of Enchantment," below, or the Enchant spell may become too powerful.

Suggested Wealth: Comfortable, or Very Wealthy if using Enchant².

Alternative Enchantments

Tinkering with the rules for enchantment itself can produce a different set of trade-offs in character design that support certain archetypes or behaviors.

Craft Enchantment

This alternative approach to enchantment requires that the enchanter also be a craftsman; a highly skilled artisan may not even need to be a very good mage. Any item to be enchanted *must* be made by the person who will enchant it. Weapons must be of *fine* quality (*very fine* quality for melee weapons at TL7+). Equipment must be of *good* quality. Other items must be of similar quality, of the sort usually retailing for 4× normal cost; this might give a -4 to the skill roll to make the item.

The enchanter gets a bonus to his skill roll to enchant the item equal to his margin of success in crafting it. He gets an additional +2 if he made the item from natural materials (mining and smelting iron ore himself to make a sword, or cutting and carving his own timber for a staff); this requires a roll on the appropriate skill.

Using this system, Enchant should only have the prerequisite of Magery 2; the requirement of artificer skills replaces that of ten spells from different colleges, since each different type of item will require a different craft skill. An enchanter might specialize in one type, such as swords or jewelry, but that makes him less flexible than a standard **GURPS** enchanter or one with a broader range of skills. He will also likely need to invest more in his craft skills, since they will not benefit from Magery, yet he cannot afford to be less skilled as a craftsman than as a mage.

This system is an alternative for enchanters to "Mysteries of the Trade" in **GURPS Fantasy**, chapter 7. Using both in the same setting but for different groups would be a good way to contrast the dour but incredible tradecraft of the dwarves with the eldritch elegance of faerie workmanship.

If the "Enchanting Tools" rules are used, a different set of tools is required for each craft skill.

Reliable Enchantment

The single skill roll for enchantment is a powerful disincentive to math-savvy players; one bad die roll could ruin game-years of work. As an alternative, the GM may treat enchantment as a long task (p. B346); setbacks become minor instead of catastrophic. Critical success no longer increases power for the item, however; it merely reduces the time required for the job. Workshops full of enchanters (if such exist) require Administration rather than enormous skill at spells to coordinate. Magic items will be about 5% cheaper, since the chance of total failure no longer exists. This is taken into account in "Enchanted

A more radical alternative is to drop the enchanting rules altogether and build magic items using the gadget limitations on p. B117. Most magic items will be Breakable, Can Be Stolen, and Unique. Generalizing the rules for study, the GM could allow enchanters to make such items

Economics," below.

The Power of Enchantment

If the GM feels that there's not enough reason to make magic items in the first place, he might want to allow the power of the item to be based on the *higher* of the enchanter's skill with the spell being enchanted or with Enchant. This will encourage enchanters to invest in Enchant rather than other in spells. It might be too powerful if combined with "Skilled Enchanters," above.

by taking 200 hours per point the advantage would cost. Using this model, knowing the spell or even knowing Enchant can be made optional without sacrificing game balance.

Enchanting Tools

The GM may require special enchanting tools. These must be themselves enchanted, with an energy cost of 5,000. If they modify effective skill (as per p. B345), adjust the time required to make them by the same amount as the price. Depending on the setting, tools may be available for sale; see "Enchanted Economics," below, for prices. Working without them would be subject to the penalties for "no equipment." The origin of the first enchanting tools might be worth a line or two in a creation myth.

If tools for enchantment need not be magical, the suggested base price is one year's wages at average income for the TL.

Other Factors

If the GM wants to let factors other than sheer skill influence the power of the resulting item, he may want to use *effective* skill, and involve the magical lenses from **GURPS Fantasy**, chapter 7; the equipment modifiers from the **Basic Set**; or even the full Hermetic magic set from **GURPS Cabal**.

Improving Items

For **GURPS Third Edition**, Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch suggested some measures that GMs might want to use to power up magic items in their campaigns; these work just as well in *Fouth Edition*:

1. Spells cast using magic items do not count as spells "on."
2. Spells cast using items are unaffected by Shock, although someone using an item is still susceptible to Distraction while concentrating on using an item.
3. Spells cast using items do not count against a mage's uses of a spell, when that matters (for example, Major and Minor Healing).

Enchanted Economics

The bulk of the cost of magic items is in the enchanter's labor. Speeding up the process makes them less expensive, unless the enchanter simply demands more money for his labor.

The default assumption in **GURPS Magic** is that a wizard is about as well-off as the average blacksmith or tavern-keeper, and significantly poorer than a typical priest or armorer, never mind a knight. Wizards (or at least enchanters, who must be exceptionally talented) may demand significantly more for their labor if it is more scarce. Magic items may be literally worth a king's ransom, or be so rare as to be beyond price!

	Slow & Sure			Quick & Dirty		
Wealth	Base	TL3	TL8	Base	TL3	TL8
Average	×0.048	\$33	\$124	×0.010	\$7	\$27

Comfortable	×0.095	\$67	\$248	×0.021	\$14	\$54
Wealthy	×0.24	\$167	\$619	×0.052	\$36	\$134
Very Wealthy	×0.95	\$666	\$2,476	×0.21	\$145	\$537
Filthy Rich	×4.8	\$3,333	\$12,379	×1.0	\$723	\$2,686

Base values are cost per mage-day for Slow & Sure enchantment, and cost per energy point for Quick & Dirty. Multiply average monthly income at the TL by the base value to get the cost of enchantment per mage day or per energy point, assuming enchanters of a given wealth level. Reduce prices by 5% if using "Reliable Enchantment," above. For those who'd rather do the math, slow and sure is (average wealth × wealth multiplier × S), where S is 0.0476 for standard enchantment or 0.0455 for reliable enchantment; quick and dirty equals (average wealth × wealth multiplier × 0.0103).

Given the hectic lives of player character enchanters, the GM may find it easier to simply roleplay each commission. For some wizards, enchantment might simply be a lucrative sideline that pays the bills for repairs to the tower and research materials.

Advantages

Finally, a few character creation options can help differentiate the dedicated enchanter from the generic wizard, and fit the use of enchantment better into the game.

Magery

See p. B66

Enchantment Only: You may learn spells normally, but may not cast them; you can only enchant them into items. This differs from One-College Magery (Enchantment) in that you can learn spells in any college, even those with Magery prerequisites, if you have the appropriate level of Magery (Enchantment Only). -30%.

No Enchantment: You may not enchant items. -15%.

No Slow & Sure Enchantment: You may only enchant items using the quick and dirty method; this limits you to weaker items. -10%.

Signature Gear

See p. B85

Using any of the optional slow & sure enchantment systems in this article, it is not possible to set a fixed ratio of character points to energy. Base the cost of a magic item on the typical enchanter's income and how long it would take to create.

* * *

Legolin barged into the laboratory, nearly knocking a carelessly stacked pile of scrolls into an oil lamp in his haste. "Anthras! Have you heard?"

*"About Kelen? Yes." Legolin paused a moment to boggle; the wizard was wearing his travel robes, but a sword's baldric was thrown over one shoulder and a quiver over the other. As Legolin stood there, a kite shield was pressed into his hands, so Anthras could grab his staff with the hand that wasn't already holding a lance. To Legolin's elven mage senses, every item shone with enchantment. "Get that cloak. Where are the others? We're ready for this. This time, we've got weapons that can actually **hurt** dragons. Burn me, indeed. I'll show those Kelen fools the difference between a demon sorcerer and an enchanter!"*

Coupons, and Other Hidden Truths of the Universe

As I'm wont to do, last week I was listening to National Public Radio, and I heard an interview on [Here and Now](#) with Tim Harford, who was plugging his new book [The Undercover Economist: Exposing Why the Rich Are Rich, the Poor Are Poor--and Why You Can Never Buy a Decent Used Car!](#) (Exclamation point theirs.)

Now, I haven't actually read the book in question -- since the last book I really had time to read involved Grover imploring me not to turn anymore pages -- but the interview was interesting. And one of the points made therein had me thinking -- wait for it -- about gaming.

Unfortunately, the idea it sparked is a proto-idea, kind of like a half-popped kernel of popcorn. Personally, I love those half-popped kernels, but if you're expecting something fully thought out and playtested, I don't want you to be disappointed. (Cue up e-mails saying, "If we wanted something fully thought out and playtested, why would we still be reading your column?")

Anyway, in the interview, Harford makes the point that supermarkets pricing schemes all focus on one idea: to figure out who cares about saving money and who doesn't. Thus a supermarket might offer produce in bagged and unbagged forms, with different prices per pound; the person who doesn't care about saving money has a 50/50 shot at spending more per pound, while the person who does care is assured of getting the best price.

Part of the extension of this idea is the supermarkets' pursuit of grandmothers. Harford hypothesizes that grandmothers are extremely sensitive to prices; if prices were to inch up at one grocery store, the grandmothers would all access the collective hive mind (AARPnet) and inform the rest of the collective, causing them to flock to another store. (I might be adding my own spin to the exact explanation . . .) Thus areas with sufficiently advanced grannytech serve to keep prices low for everyone. Conversely, grocery stores in more affluent neighborhoods are much more forgiving of price nudging; if prices rise, there won't be a resultant loss of customers.

I swear I'll be swinging this back around to gaming real soon now.

So, Tim Harford explains, grocery stores have figured out a system to ensure that those who watch costs are able to save money, while those who don't care are charged more. And the system is: coupons.

By various schemes involving coupons and advertised specials (but mostly, it seems, coupons), grocery stores are able to attract those shoppers who are sensitive to prices while performing the most optimized cashectomies on those who aren't. I personally witnessed this phenomenon first-hand when I calculated that my wife, an avid coupon-clipper and bargain-hunter, probably saves enough money each week to "earn" just shy of her normal hourly rate in that coupon-clipping time, while being able to watch television and wear her pajamas. I support her on this, while she seems less supportive of the extra work and freelance opportunities I do at home to earn extra money . . . possibly because I'm wearing her pajamas.

Anyway, the point remains: There exists a system that serves only to reward those who most care about being so rewarded.

Time to cue up the gaming relevancy.

As an avid roleplayer, I'm rewarded in many games I play with roleplaying incentives: extra experience points, bonuses to rolls, and the like. However, I realized after hearing this interview that the whole thing is rather curious, since I'm not roleplaying because of these rewards; I'd still be roleplaying even if I didn't get anything out of it. (I roleplay in just about every game I can; when playing *Life*, I'll usually craft the game's results into a tale. "And, because your father was an uninsured driver when he had that accident, we're forcing him to ride in the back seat of his tiny plastic car.")

So, to meld these ideas together, is it possible to craft a system that provides rewards only for those for whom it would

serve as an incentive? Or, looking at it from another point of view, is it possible to craft a system that can give all players what they want -- namely, more opportunities for those who like roleplaying to roleplay, *and* in-game incentive for those who may not like to roleplay?

Well, when I first had this query in my gray matter, it wasn't an easy one. After all, how can you say why someone is acting a certain way, regardless of incentive? (I mean, I may not be roleplaying for the extra experience points, but I'll spend 'em if I get 'em just the same.) However, I have an idea -- a half-baked one, but one I'm eager to try out next time I get a group together (currently scheduled for 2525¹).

Many -- if not most -- games have some kind of in-game "currency," whether it's hero points, fate points, willpower points, or the like. If nothing else, almost all dice-based games have the idea of "bonuses." What if, then, instead of providing an extra hero point or die-roll bonus to those who roleplay well, you do this:

If, within a game, a player roleplays well enough to earn a bonus of some kind, that player *instead* gets one of those points (hero point, bonus, etc.), which he has to give to another player. That other player can use that bonus however he sees fit, provided he at least pays lip service to roleplaying. (The player who spends the bonus doesn't get any additional points to give anyone else for roleplaying.) At the GM's option, the bonus-recipient player must tie his roleplaying to the bestowing character.

As an example: Players Aaaa, Bbbb, and Cccc are in a game run by Gggg. In one scene, Aaaa, playing a scientist, offers a brilliant inspirational monologue that causes Gggg to give him a point (in this game, a +2 bonus to any skill). Aaaa gives the point to Bbbb. Later on, Bbbb -- who's more of a tactician than a roleplayer -- finds his character in a tight combat spot, and eyes the bonus. Bbbb has his character reload, and wade into battle, saying, "Time for talk's done, college boy; let's show you what action can do!"

How, you might ask, does this system differ from other systems? For example, in the example above, how does the game differ with Bbbb needing to roleplay to access the bonus Aaaa gave him, versus a different game where Bbbb would get a bonus for roleplaying directly? Put simply, these points (as I envision them) are automatic; as long as Bbbb makes *some* attempt to roleplay, he's going to get that bonus. While a system that relies on good roleplaying relies on the GM agreeing with the player in question that a given moment is an example of "good roleplaying," this new system merely requires that the GM, at some point, acknowledged some player as having roleplayed something well.

In addition, the system rewards roleplayers by enabling them to bolster the group, while not rewarding them directly in way that would prove unbalancing in the same way that, say, giving extra experience points would. Plus it gives the roleplayer more chances to roleplay, *and* a greater chance of being able to interact with the other players in an interesting way. Thus in the example above, Aaaa can give Bbbb some ribbing about his "college boy" crack. In addition, this system enables roleplayers an ability to contribute to the group's well-being. (I don't know about other heavy roleplayers, but I know that my characters usually "suffered" from a min-max efficiency standpoint because I usually put a lot of focus on seemingly superfluous stuff instead of abilities that I knew would be of benefit to the group. "Hmmm . . . I think I'll raise my character's Theology to doctorate levels . . .") Plus the recipient of the bonus is never obligated to roleplay; if he doesn't want to spend the bonus, he doesn't have to. In fact, the best he can hope for from roleplaying is to reward *other* players . . . which may take some of the pressure off players to feel they "have" to roleplay to beef up their characters as much as possible.

As I said before, this isn't a well-tested system. In particular, it may result in some odd play dynamics, or it might result in skewed experience rewards at the end of adventures, since under this system roleplaying *isn't* rewarded above and beyond the bonuses for other players. But it may yet prove to shake things up in a group, and might even give a little nonthreatening incentive for those non-roleplayers to get in on the act.

If nothing else, it should give incentive for all those folks who aren't roleplaying because they're too busy clipping coupons in my wife's pajamas.

--Steven Marsh

¹ If man is still alive, natch.

Pyramid Pick

Cat: A Little Game of Little Heroes

Published by [Wicked Dead Brewing Company](#)

Written by John Wick

44-Page A5-Sized Spiral Bound Book; \$15

1.4 MEG PDF Document; \$8

As I write this review, Miw is sat watching me. In fact, she has been staring at me for some time now. Perhaps she is hungry, but when I check her dishes she has fresh food. Does she need her dirt tray emptying? I check that and no. Is she bored? I go upstairs and find "fishie on a stick" from where she dropped it last night. Once back downstairs, I jerk it up and down in front of her, but Miw just bats her eyes at me and gives me her best "Bored now," look. After all that activity I still do not know why she is staring at me.

But after reading John Wick's *Cat: A Little Game of Little Heroes*, I know more. You see, we are not in charge -- and neither are the mice. Nor are those vain vampires or woolly werewolves, so there is nothing to worry about on that front. No, the Cats are in charge, and I am not all that surprised. You see, they won a contest, between them, the Dogs, and Us. Guess who came last? And because of that, the Cats as champions have to protect the losers, Us. But from what? Simply, Boggins.

Which Miw has since told me are bad little things full of teeth and claws and claws and teeth, and we cannot see them because we are very good at ignoring them. A Boggin can cause fear and anger and laziness and all sorts of negative emotions, driving its claws and teeth into Us, working to weaken Us and eventually claim as a Boggin host. Cats protect Us from Boggins not just in the real world, but also in the Kingdom of Dreams, where they use magic to manipulate and alter the off-kilter world around them.

A Cat is defined by her Claws for fighting and climbing; Coat for protection and persuasiveness; Face for eyes, nose, ears, tongue, and whiskers -- all she can sense; Fangs for fighting and carrying; Legs for leaping, balance, and agility; and Tail for soul and Magic. A player sets one of these as her Best trait, three as her Strong traits, and the others as Good traits. Each trait is also a bonus value -- 3 for Good, 4 for Strong, and 5 for Best. Seven points are distributed between her Reputations. A Cat also has three names, what we call her, what other cats call her, and finally her secret name not to be divulged to anyone. Naturally Miw declined to tell me hers. And of course, a Cat possesses nine lives.

Mechanically Cat employs the same "Taking Risks" engine seen in the author's *Enemy Gods*. A number of six-sided dice are rolled equal to a Cat's appropriate trait, plus any Advantage Dice agreed upon between player and GM. Any Even results count towards to the Risk difficulty -- one for an Easy Risk, two for Moderate, and three for Hard. Advantage Dice are awarded for a player showing initiative and roleplaying well. For example, Moogie (Miw's not so bright sister) tries to creep up on a busily feeding Boggin, who has its claws and teeth buried in Louise whilst she is sleeping. It is dark, which gives Moogie one Advantage; the Boggin has its teeth and claws and claws and teeth buried in Louise so is distracted, another Advantage; and Moogie has managed to climb up onto the curtain rail over the Boogin in readiness to do it death from above, a third Advantage. All together, Moogie gains three Advantage Dice and Moogie is in position ready to pounce.

Combat works as a series of opposed Risks, with Cats taking damage in terms of Scars, which heal slowly, and when enough accumulate on a trait, lowers its value and effectiveness. A Cat can avoid gaining Scars in combat by expending a Life, or a Life can be used up to succeed at any Risk. A Cat also possesses Style and anything she does is carried out with flair, whilst a Dog would just get it done in a well, dogged fashion. But whenever a Risk roll succeeds

by more than the number of Evens required, a Cat earns a Style Point for every extra Even rolled. A Cat can save this Style Point for later use as an automatic Even, or alternatively to edit an aspect of the current situation. Thus Moogie, having successfully crept up on the Boggin could expend her Style Point to have Louise roll over in her sleep and unnerve the Boggin!

While all Cats suffer from the "Curse of the Bauble," inflicted long ago by a Dog Sorcerer, they also have access to magic. More feline tricks than spells, Cat Magic is powered by her Tail. Depending upon the strength of her Tail trait, a Cat can fall up to 70 feet and not suffer any Scars, disappear in the blink of an eye, perform the "Dinner Dance Ritual" (also known as the "bloody cat underfoot" ritual around here), or even the befuddling "Chase Your Tail Whammy" on Dogs! All such abilities are temporarily lost if a Cat is thoroughly soaked to the skin. Cats also have magics that can only be cast in the Kingdom of Dreams, whilst Dogs have their own magic, which is powered through canine loyalty to Us.

Refereeing *Cat: A Little Game of Little Heroes* is not an undemanding task, the intention being that the GM tell stories with the aid of the players, who are expected to have a high degree of input into the game. This is aided by the familiarity of the playing environment, which is really just your neighborhood, although just at a cat's eye level. The advice on writing and telling stories, and running the game is nicely judged from a feline angle. This is both for the real world and the Kingdom of Dreams, but where the game is lacking is in the number of story hooks. Yet in reading through the book and looking at the bestiary of creatures that includes not just rats, Bad Cats, and Dogs, but also Boggins, the GM should find ready inspiration.

Engagingly written, *Cat* is rounded off with a discussion of both Cat facts and Cat folklore. Quite literally, as the author's own late Cat Roland, has much to say on these matters. Available as either a 44-page spiral bound booklet or as a 1.4 MEG PDF, the game is suitably illustrated with a selection of publicly available pieces of artwork. Although it needs another editorial pass in places, the book is written in a light tone, and it is clear that the author is enjoying himself.

Cat: A Little Game of Little Heroes is quite simply charming. Although it will never find acceptance amongst the Dog lovers of this world, the rest of Us will be able to enjoy a game that lets Us enter the feline world, but without anthropomorphizing its protagonists. At its heart is a very caring theme, which not only sets it apart from all of those other brasher RPGs, it also lends it a softer, more feminine feel. Which is not to say that dark tales cannot be told with this game. After all, Cats are charged with protecting Us from the nasty Boggins that seek to empty and possess our very moral shell. Above all, *Cat: A Little Game of Little Heroes* is a delight, a game that should appeal to more than the bang-bang sword-swinging crowd.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Through the Desert

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

English rules by Reiner Knizia, Kevin Jacklin, Kevin Wilson, & Christian T. Petersen

Edited by Greg Benage, Kevin Wilson, & Christian T. Petersen

Art, graphics by John Gravato, Scott Nicely, & Brian Schomburg

Game board, 175 plastic camels, 30 plastic riders, 45 watering hole counters, five plastic palm trees, 40 point chips, & rulebook in eight languages; full color & boxed; \$29.95

Fantasy Flight Games doesn't seem content to come out with good new games. They realize there's money to be had by reproducing or reissuing new versions of oldies that have vanished from the market. Although perhaps not a classic in the vein of upcoming items like *Fury of Dracula*, they shepherd a new one to press with *Through the Desert*.

The object of the game is to score the most points with your various caravans.

The map uses hexagons to depict a section of desert riddled with oases and watering holes. If you want your trips to be a success you have to get your goods to market, and that means securing the vital water resources and oases. Before the game begins, everyone stakes out a few claims that become their starting points. Camels come in five colors (six, really, but more on that later), and everyone shares these camel "pools." Each player can therefore have five separate caravans, one of each color, and yours are distinguished from the others by your riders. Riders are little plastic pieces that attach to the tops of camels.

On your turn, you select two camels of whatever color(s), and use them to expand one or two of your caravans. You receive points for connecting these columns to oases (represented by palm trees) and watering holes. The former are worth a straight five points apiece, while the latter are tokens with point values from one to three, and they are kept secret from other players once you take them so no one knows how many points you've got without a little memorization. Two players cannot have the same color convoy adjacent to each other (their blue cannot connect to your blue, for example), so judicious placement of your camels can cut someone off from getting to an oasis or other strategic points.

If you can isolate a segment of the board with a single color of caravan and/or the edges of the board, you get points for every hex you cut off. An award is also given for the longest caravan in each of the five colors. When the last camel of any one color gets placed on the board, the game is over and points are totaled to determine the winner.

Fantasy Flight is still bringing quality components to the table. The camels and palm trees are just darling; the board is sturdy, mounted, and folds out; and the counters are stiff and durable. The camels sit where you put them (though the board may take some flattening out), and best of all the riders snap pretty neatly onto the backs of the camels. The riders are a more striking shade compared to the pastel plastics of the camels, so picking out whose riders and caravans are whose is easy. That said, trying to tell which "longest caravan" tokens go with which camel color, well, shades and

hues are much less forgiving there.

It takes less effort than one might think to get used to the various color schemes (the blue player has blue riders, but everyone can use blue caravan camels), something that sounds more confusing in the rules than it is in practice. Notwithstanding, the buyer should have some little baggies ready -- separating the camels into pools at the start of every game gets old fast, and having several smaller packages will make it easier to work all the components back into the box after opening. Quarters are already tight in this respect.

The mechanics could not be more enjoyable. (Although the inner workings smack of several other games, remember this one came out seven years ago.) With four ways to advance, but only one pool of camels for everyone, one must weigh one's options. You can score big points by enclosing an area, but that requires a lot of camels (to say nothing of the willful ignorance of your opponents), and that leaves that color's pool depleted. A canny opponent who sees himself ahead on points could then just spend the last few tokens and end the game while he's in front. The same holds true if you just bunch up the camels trying to get the biggest caravan award, but you're better off stretching that line out to score various board elements.

For a game with so many components and so much strategy, it plays awfully quick. You need not devote an entire evening to it, but if you do you can finish multiple games in a couple of hours. Visually pleasing, well-built, and artfully designed to foster maximum competition and careful play balance, ***Through the Desert*** makes a welcome return to the shelves. Although it shows itself off in a fairly crowded market, it has the ingredients needed to make a notable splash.

--Andy Vetromile

Old School

Low-Tech Higher Education

by Matt Riggsby

There has long been a distinction between primary and secondary education. Primary education gives the student basic academic skills, typically just literacy with an important religious or philosophical text as the curriculum, but occasionally with a bit of basic math thrown in. Beyond that, there were more focused, advanced studies. These were almost universally concerned with three subjects: law, medicine, and philosophy, with a particular emphasis on religious studies.

However, the way these advanced subjects were taught and the way their teachers were organized changed considerably through the years. For example, universities didn't exist in Europe until the 12th century, and even then it took centuries for them to take a recognizable form. Indeed, the very idea of a school as an identifiable place rather than a group of teachers is relatively modern. Here, then, is a brief education on education.

Pre-School: Greek and Roman Higher Education

Through the ancient world, no formal qualifications were required to teach. Anyone who could convince students (or, for children, their parents) to hire him could teach his intended subject. And where he taught was wherever he could find a space: private homes, rented rooms, or any public space where he could find a quiet corner. Greek gymnasia and Roman baths, both of which usually had extensive spaces for relaxation, refreshment, and alternate amusement, were popular venues for advanced teaching. The very word "academy" comes from the name of a gymnasium frequented by Plato and, later, Aristotle.

An educated person would be educated in two sets of subjects: the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic), and the quadrivium (arithmetic, music, astronomy, and geometry), which have since come to be known as the seven liberal arts. The manner of their teaching, though, tended to be informal by modern standards, particularly in their advanced forms. Teachers would lecture on whatever topics they favored. Broad classes of subject material were often fairly predictable (great authors were discussed by grammarians and rhetoricians, Plato and Aristotle by philosophers, etc.), but there was no "Philosophy 101," as distinct from advanced philosophy classes.

One consequence of this lack of formal structure is that there wasn't really a point at which a student could definitely say that he was done studying. A budding scholar could go on studying off and on for years, even the rest of his life. Even some prominent scholars of later centuries went back and forth between studying under masters of great repute and teaching on their own. Students would also travel to distant cities to study under notable teachers.

The situation hardly changed during the early Middle Ages. Monasteries preserved traditions of literacy, of course, but monks mostly taught other monks, not members of the public. When lay teaching again emerged, it did so largely along ancient lines. Again, teachers needed no formal credentials and had no dedicated schools to each in. However, certain limited exceptions arose. Cathedrals became centers of learning, focusing on philosophy and theology with some study of law. To teach in a cathedral town, one needed a license granted by the Chancellor, the head of the bishop's bureaucracy. Theoretically, the chancellor would require that a scholar of know repute vouch for the prospective teacher's qualifications, but a bribe would usually suffice.

Certain schools became notable centers of learning, including Salerno, Bologna, Paris, and Oxford. Indeed, their reputations became international. Students at a prominent school would have come from all over the country, or even from across western Europe, and in many places the same was true of the teachers. It was from that international character that the first universities would arise.

Good Morning, Teacher!: The First Universities

By the later half of the 12th century, one of the problems faced by Medieval scholars is that, at the major centers of learning, they were mostly foreigners. At the time, people living outside their own city or country had few if any rights and a very disadvantaged legal position. Taking the lead provided by other professionals and tradesmen of the era, the scholars started to do the sensible thing to protect themselves: they formed guilds.

These guilds were the first universities. Or, at least, the first universities devoted to scholarship. The word "universitas," from which "university" is derived, simply meant an association or guild. There were already organizations called universities, but these were associations of tradesmen (that is, what we would recognize as guilds), social clubs, or civic "corporations" administering towns. The scholars simply formed an association representing their interests to the authorities and adopted an appropriate name for their organization.

Now that they were organized, they could take steps to protect their interests. Scholars at the new universities were able to build a monopoly on higher education by playing on the fears and aspirations of students, forcing out teachers who weren't members of the guild. Even though, at the moment, the only true legal requirement concerning teaching was a license from the chancellor, and even that was only required to teach at a cathedral (which was only an issue in some cities), the new guilds could at least exclude teachers who would not join them, effectively making a university degree a license to teach.

More importantly, they were also able to demand new legal protections for themselves. The universities demanded new rights and privileges for their members from the authorities in the cities where they were based, with the threat of shutting themselves down or moving to another location altogether. *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* notwithstanding, a philosopher's strike was actually something of a concern to the cities, kings, and bishops who might be affected. Having a university was a point of prestige for a ruler, and the students provided significant revenues for the city where they were established. Early 13th-century Oxford is an extreme example; with around 3,000 students and faculty, they were in danger of outnumbering the non-academic natives. If they left, that was a tremendous loss in rental income, sales of food and clothing, and so on. And at this point, the university was still just an association of scholars, without buildings or endowments to tie it to one place, so the university could, in fact, pick up and leave.

And they did just that. Several of the early universities had occasion to relocate from their original homes to other cities or scatter across the landscape in protest of their treatment by civic or church officials. In each case through the 13th century, the authorities caved in or were overruled by kings and popes. Teachers and students were afforded legal protections similar to those given to clergy. Scholars were no longer subject to civil law and could only be tried in ecclesiastical courts, which were notoriously lenient towards defendants. Professional academics were now safe in foreign cities, at least from everyday conflicts.

Once the idea arose, kings and popes decided to get in on the act. Eager scholars running schools in less influential centers petitioned rulers for charters, and rulers, eager to buy their loyalty and establish authority over the new institutions, granted them. By the end of the 13th century, there were ten or eleven universities across Europe, with new ones springing up every decade or two. Scholars had growing legal immunity, and growing power to exert their will. Bound by oaths taken at graduation, graduates were obligated to support their university for the rest of their lives, so a general strike by a university angry at its country's authorities could cripple the ecclesiastical and civil bureaucracies they staffed. Universities were usually focused on abstruse philosophical debates and the protection of their own privileges, but for the later half of the Middle Ages, they were also a political force to be reckoned with.

Student Union

In most of Europe, it was the faculty who first "unionized." However, some important universities in Italy followed a somewhat different course, albeit with similar ultimate results. At the first major university in Italy, the law school at Bologna, it was the students who first formed an organization. There, the faculty were mostly Bolognese anyway, so they were already protected. The students, though, were largely foreign. Like the teachers of the north, they called their own strikes, which were equally effective in shutting down the schools and winning legal rights (after all,

Student Life

By the time universities were firmly established, they had changed and regularized the character of formal study. Students usually started in their mid-teens. The only requirements to be accepted as a student ("admission" might be a misleading word, there being no institution to be admitted to quite yet) were literacy and a very basic understanding of Latin. Students at many universities had a reputation for drunkenness and boisterous behavior, which is perhaps to be expected of a population of teenage boys living largely on their own in a big city without parental supervision.

students paying fees are every bit as necessary to a school as teachers), with the additional twist that they were able to impose regulations on their teachers concerning everything from materials covered to timing of classes.

Universities had at least two "faculties," or teachers of a given body of subject matter. The largest was usually the Arts faculty, nominally teachers of the ancient subjects of the trivium and quadrivium. In practice, logic dominated the other subjects to the point where everything was taught in theories and dialogs; this is the point in history where languages came to be taught with rules of grammar rather than by examples of what is and is not proper usage. The remaining subjects were largely given lip service. Aristotle (whose works were not all available at the time, and those that were, in retrospect, were not all that well translated) was put on a pedestal, and his works were considered nearly on par with the Bible and the Church fathers for authority. An Arts education typically took five or six years. After two or three, the student would become a Bachelor, with limited rights to teach, and after the full course would become a full-fledged Master.

A university almost invariably had at least one of four "higher" faculties, although none had all of them: canon (church) law, civil law, medicine, and theology. These can be considered similar to what we'd call graduate schools. Students under these faculties were somewhat older, and it was at least hoped, if not required, that they would have received an arts education first. The first three faculties were immensely lucrative. An education in civil law promised a rewarding career in business and politics, a degree in canon law put one in line for important positions in the Church, and medical doctors have always made good money. But theology, though a series of popes tried very hard to encourage its study, was often the poor cousin of the other schools. The course of study was grueling (often ten to twelve years, twice as long as other subjects), and though it might qualify one for religious debates, there was no money and little chance for high office in it (most popes didn't have a theology degree, and would often defer to theological scholars in abstruse philosophical debates). And of those people who could afford that much schooling, not many were interested in spending that much time and effort in a field with little practical application. Increasingly, the classrooms of the theology departments were filled with members of mendicant orders, Dominican and Franciscan friars, who were supported by their orders during their education.

Universities, like other guilds, conducted themselves more or less democratically. Officials were generally elected rather than appointed by an authority, and they acted as administrators and mediators rather than rulers. However, the nature of that democracy was rarely as simple as "one man, one vote." At most universities, the faculty, students, or both were organized into subdivisions according to their nationality. For example, at Paris, they were divided into the French (that is, scholars from central France and just about everything to the south, including Spain and Italy for some reason), Picards (from northwest France and the Netherlands), Normans (from northwest France), and English (everyone not included in the first three, including Germans, Slavs, and Scandinavians). Oxford, on the other hand, was almost entirely English, so the scholars were divided into North and South, while at Bologna, the students were divided between Italians and non-Italians. No important action would be taken or policy put in place without the agreement of the "Nations." Academic politics were more exciting than they are these days, with fistfights a common occurrence during particularly vigorous debates and brandished swords not being uncommon.

Town vs. Gown

From Bangkok to Paris, Tiananmen Square to Kent State, protests and riots driven by university students are a fixture of modern life. So much so that it may be surprising to learn that they go back to the beginning of the university. Indeed, student riots were among the formative events of some very important universities. In the first decade of the 13th century, both Paris and Oxford saw tavern brawls

Of course, few large organizations function without money, and the organizations in question were first and foremost groups of tradesmen. Teachers collected fees directly from their students. Tuition could be subject to negotiation, so some students might pay by the lecture, some for a month or year at a time, and any one student could pay more or less for his education than another, depending on the teacher and his own skill at negotiation. Likewise, class schedules would depend on the individual student's interest in attending lectures. Study itself would consist of attending lectures, discussing subject material, and reading. There would be few if any specific assignments beyond recommended readings from the teacher; the idea of writing a paper on a set topic would almost certainly be a novel one. It's worth noting that the typical final "examination" required the student to defend a proposition in a debate, not to write anything down.

involving students turn into violent riots leaving several dead and resulted in student and faculty strikes which established the power and willingness of the universities to pack up and leave if strongly motivated.

The university collected fees from newly created bachelors, masters, and university officers. It was typical for the period for new officials to pay someone for the office, or at least to pay for a commemorative feast. These costs could become enormous. Sometimes students had to delay their graduation for months or years in order to raise the necessary funds to pay for the obligatory ceremonies. By all accounts, though, the university spent money as fast as it came in. At least, students and teachers alike were notorious for pleading poverty.

What nobody did at this point, though, was to buy or build buildings. Teachers still lectured in homes, public spaces, or rented rooms. There was no such thing as a university campus, only members of a guild. But that was about to change.

Ivy-Covered Halls

For some years, students had clubbed together to rent housing together, but there was still a sizable population of eager students who, when they had to choose between paying for education or housing, chose the former and begged for the latter. As the universities grew more powerful and important, powerful people endowed several charitable hostels for the poorest students. Living conditions were relatively primitive, the food bad, and the house rules imposed on the students strict (many colleges were religiously endowed and had rules resembling those of a monastery), but it was better than begging for bread. These hostels, called "colleges," tended to be in fixed places, sometimes even purpose-built buildings.

Then, probably late in the 13th century, a curious thing started happening: the parents of some students (who, since the students were by now overwhelmingly in their teens, still had some say in how their money was spent) wanted their children to live in the closely regulated colleges rather than freely in the immoral atmosphere of the city. And they were willing to pay for the privilege. Though many students doubtless resented it, many colleges began to accept paying students as well as charity cases, so they came to hold a very large proportion of the student population.

As it turned out, this was apparently good for their education. The students' notorious tendencies towards drunkenness and violence were blunted somewhat, and the colleges provided a good environment for study and discussion. The masters who were hired to run the colleges provided tutoring and oversight, and in time the colleges started asking teachers to deliver lectures there. This suited the teachers, since it relieved them of the need to find and pay for teaching spaces, and so the colleges began to absorb the day-to-day business of teaching. By the end of the Middle Ages, teachers belonged to the university, in that it organized them for political and legal action and provided them a framework of standards, but for employment they essentially belonged to a college as well, at last tying the university down to a single location.

Although there were other factors (the rise of the mendicant orders, for one; in disputes between universities and friars, popes usually sided with the latter), this was perhaps the most visible symbol of the decline of the university from political power to mere school. In addition to the colleges, universities began to acquire churches and other buildings, which meant that they would lose a great deal if the members relocated. Without the ability to pick up and leave if things weren't going its way, the university lost its greatest weapon. Kings, bishops, and popes could curtail their freedoms, and increasingly came down on the other side of disputes. The oaths of perpetual loyalty taken by graduates

likewise became diluted as a handful of great universities found competition from newer, smaller ones. Universities remained intellectual centers, but in political terms, they were tethered giants: huge, but unable to move.

Not On The Exam

The astute reader will notice that the subjects taught at Medieval schools cover a very narrow range. Many humanities, most social sciences, and except for astronomy the full range of physical sciences don't receive a mention.

Some of the missing subjects wouldn't have been completely absent from a Medieval education. They simply wouldn't have been taught as subjects in their own right. For example, a student would likely be exposed to a smattering of history by reading ancient historians in pursuit of, say, grammatical or rhetorical points or by reading hagiographies in pursuit of theological examples. However, many subjects simply didn't exist yet or only existed in a rudimentary form, including geology, archaeology, anthropology, psychology, biology, physics, and chemistry. Others might be taught purely as theory. Music, for example, would be considered purely in abstract terms, without any particular urgency felt about actually picking up a musical instrument; or art might be considered in philosophical conjectures on the nature of beauty without anyone picking up a brush or a sculptor's chisel.

Practical subjects were taught in a practical fashion rather than by "book learning," and they weren't taught to university students. Technical specialists at the top levels, architects and people we would call engineers, would be literate and might have a moderate formal education, but that would be incidental to their craft. What they knew about building bridges, constructing ships, making clocks, and so on would have been learned on the job, by assisting a master performing those tasks. A learned university man wouldn't design a cathedral; indeed, he wouldn't know where to begin. He'd have a lucrative position which would allow him to hire a tradesman to do it for him.

Big East

Of course, different societies produce different institutions and practices for higher learning. In the Muslim world, *madrasas* more closely resembled modern schools than just about anything in the contemporary west in that they involved actual school buildings, although they were fairly minimal. A typical madrasa was simply a number of cell-like rooms set around a courtyard. The rooms were occupied by individual teachers and advanced students, and they might function as combined lodging, office space, and classroom. Students would gather at their teacher's room for lectures and retire to their own to read and take their own notes.

Muslim scholarship also developed credentials earlier than in the west. A teacher was granted a license to teach by his own master when the master decided that the time had come. A teacher would be able to trace the pedigree of his credentials through generations of scholars into time immemorial.

The function of madrasas was explicitly religious. Madrasa students would memorize the Qur'an, learn haddiths (sayings attributed to Mohammed but not part of the Qur'an itself), examine commentaries on the Qur'an, and so on. However, unlike the west, which had separate bodies of church and civil law, the Muslim world based its laws solely on the Qur'an. As a result, the madrasas were also the law schools. An advanced student would learn law, rhetoric, and logic along with the basic Qur'anic studies, and upon graduation have sufficient credentials to be a lawyer or even a judge.

There were medical schools as well, of course, which quickly developed relatively advanced requirements for entry. A prospective medical student was required to have completed at least a basic course of studies at a madrasa, and depending on the school might have to have additional education in legal studies.

For the most part, Chinese education resembled that of pre-university Europe. Teachers were usually independent businessmen who needed no formal licensing. Beyond basic literacy, higher education concentrated on its own set of central texts, with Confucius enjoying a similar status to Aristotle in Europe.

The most notable difference between Chinese and western education is that in China there were academic

qualifications. They simply had little or nothing to do with making more teachers. The imperial government recruited officials and bureaucrats based on the results of regularly set exams, which consisted of essay questions of Confucian texts and commentaries. Academic honors won through these exams might, conceivably, have been used to set up shop as a notable teacher, but it would take an unusual man to think of it and an even more unusual family not to talk him out of it. Rather, high scores on the exams were a guarantee of a cushy and influential government job. A man didn't just make his own fortune, but that of his entire family. Even a commoner could achieve a huge jump in status this way, and in some periods many did.

Naturally, doing well on the exams was the fervently pursued goal of many young men, which shaped the teaching profession. Private tutors did a bustling business with people cramming to pass the exams. So while commoners *could* make their fortune by doing well on their exams, it was usually the aristocrats who made the high scores, since they had the time to study and the money to hire teachers.

Ancient Schools In The Campaign

Probably the most important thing to keep in mind about early universities is that they resemble grass-roots political organizations or self-policing professional groups like the Bar Association far more closely than they do modern educational institutions. They provide no material resources or facilities to faculty or students. In addition to a lack of classrooms, they have no laboratories and fund no research (indeed, the very idea of a research institution would baffle most Medieval scholars). They don't even have libraries. What they have is a monopoly on what is to some a valuable trade and a willingness to use that for leverage in order to obtain legal privileges for their members.

A university student or university-educated character isn't a bad choice for a PC. Just as adventurers are habitually mobile, so were many scholars. A character could be motivated to study under different notable teachers just as easily as by a desire to kill things and take their stuff. Student riots involving swords are, as already mentioned, not uncommon, so PCs tendency towards armed violence isn't necessarily inappropriate for a scholar. The legal immunity granted to university members could be extremely useful for a PC, although that can be balanced by the inconvenience of having to boycott whichever city, country, or ruler his university becomes angry with, should an occasion arise.

Conversely, a university might not make a legendary enemy, but it can be an extremely inconvenient rival. There's no one person a PC can remove in order to rid himself of the enmity of a university, and there's that pesky legal authority which would make it difficult to attack the university through legal means. A footloose PC could simply leave wherever the university happens to be, but one who is invested in a particular place (say, the captain of the Cardinal's guards) would have a hard time of it. Enmities within a university might also be interesting to explore. Medieval educational theory is all about argument, so it shouldn't be hard for an academic PC to find rivals, if not enemies, and there's the additional twist of avoiding heresy in an opponent's position.

And what does all of this mean for a fantasy campaign? Magic, in most games, requires advanced study. Any of the educational schemes here could be taken as a model for teaching esoteric fields of spell-casting and alchemy, depending on the game world's assumptions about magical practice. A fixture of fantasy is the sorcerer's apprentice, a lone student whose sole teacher is a magician. That's certainly fine, particularly where those solitary teachers, like most Medieval guildsmen, are concerned with preserving trade secrets, but in campaigns where magic is better known and more public, other models might be used. Casual teaching in the ancient and early Medieval mode could easily arise if individual spells are relatively easy to pick up or if spellcasting requires a broad body of theory which the individual can put into practice on his own. If magic requires more intensive study, a system like Muslim madrasas or European universities might appear, providing a more stable framework for the necessary long-term education. The "wizard's guild" could easily turn out to be a university faculty. Say hello to visiting professor Thoth-Amon from Stygia U . . .

Rules are for the Weak

by Heather Barnhorst

It is a truism in my *Dungeons & Dragons* group that I don't know jack about the rules. Some people might find this assertion strange since I've been playing the game since I was 17 but I consider my refusal to learn these rules to be a testament to my core belief about games. I don't play games to learn rules -- I learn rules to play games. If I can get away without learning them, I will. Then again, I might just be blowing smoke to cover the fact that I find the *Player's Handbook* overwhelming. While *Dungeons & Dragons* is not the most complex roleplaying system, the handbook is long, it is boring, and it doesn't make sense. I learned more about playing *Dungeons & Dragons* from reading *Dungeons & Dragons for Dummies* than I had from playing the game for 25 years.

One Die to Rule Them All

What I discovered about *Dungeons & Dragons* is that the whole *d20 System* moniker is mostly true. Whenever I am in doubt in one of our gaming sessions, whenever I've been discovered not to be paying attention to yet another combat or am involved in another finding-a-trap-by-triggering-it moment, whenever I've laid my head down on the table to "rest my eyes for a moment," I can usually cover my egregious lapse by looking around the table in a chirpy manner and rolling a d20. If I am not playing in our *Dungeons & Dragons* game, this behavior seems odd to say the least. "No Heather, we're playing the *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* game this week."

Hating rules the way I do, I have spent some time parsing out how to play RPGs without having to learn them. My solution? Learn the master die. It could be a d10 or double d6s (and yes, if you always thought that uttering "double d6s" sounded salacious then you are not alone) or just a multitude of d6s. "Okay Heather, roll a gadjillion d6s, if you roll tenjillion or more 5s and 6s, Walrus Woman" -- that's my character -- "kills Lemon Head." More is simply not better. I am resentful. Skill-based or stat-based -- it really doesn't matter. "Rolling dice" seems like a terrible atrocity to visit upon a bunch of innocent bits of resin. I would much rather count them, stack them, or line them up by polyhedral sides and gradations of hue. This exercise is called "the counting of the dice" and no game can start until I've ascertained that all my dice are present and accounted for.

Anyway -- what kind of game resolves every action by rolling dice? Just when I have successfully sunk myself into my character, just when I am boozehounding the way she should, tramping through a swamp the way she should, fighting goblins the way she should, a voice from on high says, "Roll to resolve the situation."

"Why?"

"Because that's the rule."

Humbug to Rules

Don't hurt me; I'm not one of those Storyteller do-gooders who just wants to "feel" everything, but I have to say that rules really are for the weak. At their best, they distract only slightly from the roleplaying experience. At their worst, they become the *raison d'etre* for some gamers' existence. Dude, rules are supposed to help you express your character's inner essence, not become your character's motivations.

My hatred of game rules is also the reason that I hate to play lawful characters. Give me a chaotic gnome over a noble Paladin any day of the week. Gnomes are funnier and they understand how to have a good time in a seedy bar. Paladins are forced to follow rules set down from on high or their god spurns them and takes away all their manly powers. And I hate roleplaying by committee so when my party starts discussing what to do next, my gnome stops talking and starts doing.

"Where's the gnome? Not again!"

"Heather, do you have to story-bust every adventure I write?"

"I do, I do," I say in my most gnomish of voices.

"I don't get it, you are all about rules in real life."

This Ain't Real Life . . . Or is it?

In real life I abide by plenty of rules. Some of them are stupid, others are silly and some are simply incomprehensible. Rules are kind of like the IRS -- you don't have to understand them to know that following them is better than having your house foreclosed on you. I have discovered that if I can find the one rule, the Master Rule, that governs the creation of all the rest that I can usually minimize my participation in the useless ones. The Master Rule allows me to operate within the gray areas of bureaucracy. Life is just like ***Dungeons & Dragons*** -- find the master die and everything else falls into place. For example:

Airports: Stand in line. All other airportian behaviors can be extrapolated from understanding that you will stand in line to have people ask you if you are, could be, or might have been at any time a dangerous criminal. At the very least, you will stand in line so that you can remove your shoes. Be sure to wear nice socks.

Hotels: Hotels change names about as often as Persian rug dealers hold "Going Out of Business" sales. "We're a business hotel; no we're a vacation hotel; no we're a conference hotel." I'm not sure that even hotel management has figured this one out.

Karaoke: The most popular songs are the ones that have choruses that can be sung repeatedly and loudly by drunken Clay Aiken wannabes. This Master Rule explains how the same bar denizens puffing clouds of cancer-causing agents out of one side of their mouths while struggling to sing in key out of the other can love both *Sweet Caroline* and *Living on a Prayer*.

You, too, can come up with your own Master Rules for life. Make a game of it -- it passes the time while you are standing in line at the airport.

The Retailer Master Rule on How to Succeed in Business

I have to ask myself, "What Master Rule should I follow as a game retailer?" I have lots of rules, mostly developed from habit and happenstance, but which is the one that truly governs all my interactions with my Best Customers (and that's all of you)? Before your hopes climb too high, let me clue you in on my dirty secret. The Master Rule isn't that "the customer is always right." I hate that I have been forced to mention it in front of you in case I've damaged your ego but you, my dears, are not always right. In fact, you are very often very wrong and I would look silly if I agreed with you 100% of the time or tried to cater to your whims even when they are based on your error.

"Nope, sorry, the new edition of ***GURPS Martial Arts*** is not out yet. Would you like to preorder it with me?"

"But the website says that it is available."

"It does? Then by all means, I will order it promptly for you, my good man, and we should see it next week."

What if I know that there is no possible way that the newest ***GURPS Martial Arts*** revision has been published? Perhaps an error was made on the SJGames website, perhaps you misunderstood something you read (like that never happens) and now I am supposed to compound the error by agreeing with you. Not only am I spitting in the face of common sense but I may even be preventing you from possessing that book when it does release.

I would better serve you if I gently pointed out that the website only states that it is an upcoming release with some

teasers to heighten your interest. Then I can say, "So we know it is releasing mid-year 2006. Would you like me to put you down for a copy?" That way you learn something, you eventually purchase your book, and you are now far happier than when you thought that I was lying to you and that for some unfathomable reason my goal in life was to keep that book out of your hands. Of course, there are the few times when you are right (and I hate those) and then I have to swallow my bitter words of "Damn it! Not again," and tell you what a wonderful customer you are for informing me about my error.

What is my one retailer Master Rule to govern all else? After long contemplation, I have divined one although it completely countermands everything your mother ever told you:

"Do talk to strangers."

What?! What does that mean? Your mother probably told you the same bits of mother wisdom that mine did. Be safe, be polite, always wear clean underwear, and never talk to strangers. Maybe your mother has more street cred than mine but she certainly doesn't understand how a game store works.

All we retailers own in our arsenal of weapons against the Big Store Closure in the Sky is our friendliness. Anyone with enough money to throw at a retail operation or enough patience to build up an impressive inventory can create a kick-ass store. Anyone with the ability to put together a rudimentary website and the willingness to deep discount to earn the pittance to keep them in style in their parents' basement can compete with a Brick & Mortar store and probably chip away at its business. Anyone can build beautiful fixtures and attend business schools and advertise. So if what I am writing is true (and it absolutely is), then what elevates a great store from a store that is quickly turning into an also-ran?

Talking to strangers. Strangers walk into the store every day. They had better not be walking out again as strangers. I can ignore them and let them wander or I can greet them and talk to them. Once I talk to them, they turn into you -- another one of my best customers. When I talk to them, I learn about them and suddenly we've embarked on an interesting journey together.

Help My DM Killed My Character

Back to my ***Dungeons & Dragons*** game and what happens when I don't follow the rules in the fantasy La-La land that my DM has spent his creative sweat setting up. For those of you who cannot bear another story about a ***Dungeons & Dragons*** character, I warn you to stop reading. Yes, I've descended that low in this column. The rest of you can follow me for a few more paragraphs.

So here it is. I had this cute little human (or so I thought) magic-user by the name of Gaewynn. She liked nothing better than to traipse through the woods in Isadora Duncan-like accoutrements. If there was jewelry involved, then all the better. You can imagine her singing if you wish and I will confirm that she did indeed sing on a regular basis while walking through the woods. I don't remember what her particularly egregious infraction was that day -- perhaps asking a Pegasus if she could have a lock of his hair or maybe trying to make friends with that lonely dragon under the mountain but I am sure that the party (and the GM) was tired of saving her from the messes she insisted on visiting upon herself, mainly because she wouldn't follow the rules. That night she went to sleep under a giant oak tree. It was a nice oak tree and Gaewynn liked it very much. Then the voice of doom.

"Gaewynn, roll for a spot check."

"But I'm asleep. How can I spot anything?" One of the few times that I have quoted a rule. To tell the truth, I was probably sorting my dice and didn't want to be bothered to roll one. I am not usually so argumentative in game.

"You're right." The sound of dice rolling. "Okay, that oak tree that you are sleeping under? It falls on you. You're dead."

And, that my friends, is what happens to you when you don't follow the Master Rule. And even if you do.

Just roll the damn die and live with the consequences.

Banjoko the Mganga

for the *Nyambe* setting for the *d20 System*

by Phil Masters

*Note: This character is designed for use in the **Nyambe d20 setting** (as published by Atlas Games). However, he can be adapted for use in other settings, provided that they support the idea of a dedicated, rather solitary servant of some spirits or gods with these particular powers. If you don't have access to the **Nyambe** core book, replace Banjoko's n'anga levels with Cleric, and his mganga levels with Sorcerer or Wizard.*

Banjoko is someone who came to the life of magic and adventure quite late. He was born in an ordinary rural village in the Empire of Mabwe, and spent most of his life as a very ordinary villager. He did develop an especially strong sense of devotion to his revered ancestors, and many people would say that he was old somewhat before his time, grumbling about youngsters with no respect for their elders and for tradition when his was little more than a youngster himself.

However, Banjoko's life changed a few years after his children had all gone off to marry and start families of their own, and his wife had died. While wandering in the bush near his village one day in search of a lost goat, Banjoko experienced what he is convinced was a vision from the Ancestral Orisha -- a call for him to serve his people as something more than just another lesser patriarch. Whether the orisha had indeed come to him that day, they were certainly willing to accept his service; he became a n'anga priest, spending several years leading worship to the ancestors.

However, Banjoko's strong sense of what is *right*, and his belief that the world was full of wrong-doing and lawlessness, eventually led him to treat the priesthood as simply a stepping-stone to a greater calling; he became a mganga -- a witch-doctor. Retiring to the depths of the local bush, he built himself a (rather ramshackle) hut, and applied his mind to mastery of arcane but lawful magics.

While he is still relatively restricted in his mganga abilities, Banjoko has already acquired a fierce reputation as someone who can deal with problems -- for a price, and on his own terms. While very few people exactly *like* him, he's the man to see if one is having problems with a mchawi wizard, a Zombi cult, or certain categories of supernatural monster. He can also provide healing aid, although he must be asked respectfully, and he may refuse if he doubts that the person asking is devout or respectful enough. Word of his talents has even reached the provincial capital; the governor hasn't yet found a need to send to him for help, but it's likely to happen one day. At one point, he leant very useful aid to a mask-making group dedicated to Nimbala the Judge, who gifted him with one of their magical masks as a mark of sincere respect.

Game Uses

For someone with a total of 12 character levels, Banjoko really isn't very tough, mostly because age hampers him quite badly these days. But then, that's not the point; he's not intended to provide a direct opponent for PCs, even if they are the sort of people he'd actually quite happily fight (say, the GM has let people play mchawi). Rather, he's someone with whom they might have to deal on a neutral or "friendly" basis. If anyone important, PC or NPC, wants Banjoko's help, someone will have to go and find him, explain the problem, and probably escort him back to the town or village which needs his aid. This is the sort of job which PCs will often accept -- and frankly, few other people are likely to want it, especially after they've met Banjoko.

Because, apart from anything else, he can be quite impressively rude to people, irrespective of social class or personal power. This is partly his "old geezer" crankiness, and partly a pose designed to ensure that other people have proper respect for his position, but mostly it's just his nature. This goes beyond mere surliness and "in my day" irascibility;

he'll quite openly use his Inquisitor feat to check people for "dubious" magical abilities, and be rather blunt (though not *automatically* hostile) to any sei (sorcerers) or fellow mganga he detects, and he'll even cast spells to prevent people lying to him -- without concealment or apology. He usually wears his magical mask when in public (although he'll take it off in private, even if a few escorts and bodyguards -- say, the PCs -- are around); the advantages it grants him are very useful, but more to the point, it's another way of preserving his mystique and ensuring that the "young fools and disrespectful rogues" with whom he has to deal still show him a modicum of respect.

Banjoko has a clear idea of his own importance and a working sense of self-preservation; while he's not actually a coward, he'll happily let someone else take the obvious risks when, say, fighting monsters. Fortunately, his magic can usefully enhance such champions -- when he remembers or can be persuaded to use it.

Incidentally, Banjoko is only marginally less polite to demihumans than he is to most humans; his prejudices are more general and diffuse than that. However, he might regard unthlatu with a very little more caution, given their known interest in sorcery, and he would certainly share all the normal human deep uncertainty about ngoloko. Fortunately, he's never yet had direct dealings with such beings.

Aside from his mask, Banjoko usually wears rather plain clothes, even seeming shabby by Tembu standards, though signs of fine decoration and good manufacture are visible on close inspection. He always carries a staff which was previously carried by various of his ancestors, but this is therefore his personal holy symbol; he will *never* use it to lean on or as a weapon (that, he thinks, would be disrespectful), despite the fact that he would often seem to need some kind of support while hobbling along.

Banjoko

Male Tembu Human, 2nd level Commoner/7th level N'anga/3rd level Mganga

SZ M (humanoid); HP 28; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+2 Sanguar,

-1 Dex); Atk +5 Melee (1d4-2/crit 19-20/x2 dagger, or 1d6-2/crit 20/x2 club), or +6 Ranged (not usually used); Face 5 ft. × 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Granted Powers, Spells; SQ Aligned Spells, Familiar, Mask; AL LN; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +13; Str 6, Dex 8, Con 7, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 14.

Skills: Concentration +4, Handle Animal +7, Heal +9, Knowledge (Religion) +8, Knowledge (Arcana) +9, Listen +5*, Profession (Farmer) +8, Read Lips +4, Scry +13, Sense Motive +6**, Spot +6***, Use Rope +1.

* Gains +2 while familiar is within arm's reach.

** Gains +10 while wearing mask.

*** Gains +2 while familiar is within arm's reach, **and** +10 while wearing mask.

Armor and Weapon Proficiencies: All Simple Weapons, no armor.

Feats: Create Gris-Gris, Endurance, Extend Spell, Extra Turning (+4 attempts), Great Fortitude, Inquisitor, Iron Will, Rhetoric, Sanguar, Skill Focus (Scry). In addition, Banjoko gains Alertness whenever his familiar is within arm's reach of himself. All permanent bonuses from feats are already included or noted where applicable.

Languages: Kordo (Native), Halfling (Agogwe).

Spells As a N'anga of the Ancestor Orisha, Banjoko's chosen domains are Protection and Strength. He typically has the following spells prepared:

N'anga: 0 Level -- Detect Magic ×2, Detect Poison ×2, Light, Purify Food and Drink. 1st Level -- Bless Water, Cause Fear, Detect Evil, Protection from Evil, Obscuring Mist, Sanctuary (Domain). 2nd Level -- Augury, Delay Poison, Hold Person, Zone of Truth, Bull's Strength (Domain). 3rd Level -- Dispel Magic, Remove Curse, Remove Disease, Magic Vestment (Domain). 4th Level -- Divination, Spell Immunity (Domain).

Mganga: 0 Level -- Detect Poison, Disrupt Undead, Detect Magic ×2. 1st Level -- Magic Weapon, Hold Portal, Protection from Evil. 2nd Level -- Hypnotic Pattern, Darkvision. 3rd Level -- Lightning Bolt.

Magic Item: Mask of Nimbala the Judge (Minor Wondrous Item).

If the Rat (Banjoko's Familiar)

If is a rather mangy and battered-looking rat, no more appealing than his wild brethren. However, if one looks closely, the light of enhanced intelligence glitters in his eyes, and he serves Banjoko faithfully and effectively.

HD/Level 12; HP 14; Init +2; Spd 15 ft.; AC 16; Atk +9/+4 (1d3-4); SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +9; Str 2, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 2.

Skills: As Banjoko, plus also Balance +10, Climb +12, Hide +18, Move Silently +10.

Alien Space Bats

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Matt Riggsby

The alien space bats, known to long-time alien-watchers and conspiracy theorists as ASBs, may not be the most dangerous or hostile of alien species, but they are by far the most annoying. When history takes strange turns, when people attempt the impractical or impossible, and particularly when they succeed, you can bet that the alien space bats are behind it.

They resemble nothing more than earthly bats, only approximately human-sized. They're actually a bit smaller on average than humans, but are also relatively smart and agile. They have four limbs, two of which are arms. They are entirely capable of flight. However, they can't make effective use of their hands while airborne. Their vision is poor, which they partially make up for with a sonar sense.

Their power lies in their advanced technology (particularly strong in stealth, teleportation, and other areas which allow them to manipulate situations from afar) and their limited powers of mind control. Although most ASBs are incapable of directly controlling a human mind, they are all capable of implanting powerful suggestions, making people believe things which are patently false, or at least poorly thought-out. A small minority of "Master" ASBs can go so far as to assume direct control of individuals, making them behave as desired. The Master ASBs, by the way, are the acknowledged leaders of ASB society. Since they have mind control powers, they'd probably take charge anyway, so the ASBs have done the sensible thing and let them have it.

ASBs prefer to remain in the background, never taking part in any confrontations but rather manipulating others as pawns. They will induce mass delusions, secretly grant entirely novel technologies, manipulate climate, or take control of powerful leaders of lower-tech worlds from orbiting spacecraft or secure locations. If attacked directly, they will nevertheless have the full range of arms and armaments available at their TL. As a last resort, their favored hand-to-hand weapon is a large, well-balanced club (we'll pause here for you to fill in the punch line). There is no known ASB home planet. Whether they originated in space or they had a home planet which is now lost or destroyed, the ASBs are aliens wherever they go.

ASBs in the Campaign

It's not clear why the ASBs act as they do. It's generally believed that they're intensely curious about "lower" life forms and are interested in performing a wide range of experiments on them to see how their societies react. It's not impossible, though, that there's a more sinister purpose behind their actions.

As a power-behind-the-scenes, the ASBs are well-suited to campaigns with hidden truths, where they can be just one conspiracy among many. They can also be used to smooth over any kind of implausibility, if the GM needs to provide a justification. For example, in a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*-style campaign, why don't people acknowledge the existence of the monsters eating their friends and relatives on a nightly basis? It's the ASBs!

Their ideal use, though, may be to paper over the cracks of an older conspiracy campaign where the GM has, perhaps, lost control of multiple threads of secrets and secret societies. If PCs start to piece things together and realize that various groups are acting irrationally, it may be because they *are* acting irrationally. They're under the influence of the Alien Space Bats, compelled to

Alien What, Now?

For those of you not in on the joke, "alien space bats" is a term used to describe the convoluted rationalizations necessary to justify one's pet speculations. The term appears to have originated with the late Alison Brooks in the soc.history.what-if Usenet newsgroup in 1998. In the course of debunking of the possibility of a successful Operation Sealion, it was

believe in a hollow earth, the Holy Grail, capitalism, communism, and other absurd ideas.

And it doesn't have to end there. There could easily be factions among the ASBs, experimenting on one another and making each other believe unreasonable things. It might be that the whole of ASB society is deluded, with every ASB under the influence of another, also deluded, ASB.

Alien Space Bats (149 points)

Attributes: ST -2 [-20]; IQ +1 [20]; DX +1 [+20]; HT -1 [-10]

Advantages: Affliction, 3 levels (Severe Delusion, +15%; 30x duration +60%; Malediction, long range modifiers, 200%) [113]; Flight (Winged -25%, Temporary Disadvantage: No Manipulators -50%) [10]; High Technology +3 [15]; Scanning Sense (Sonar, increased range 5x, +30%) [26]

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (nearsighted) [-25]

Most ASBs have skills related to work in outer space: piloting, engineering, zero-g operations, etc. However, none are prevalent enough to justify adding them to the template.

In high-tech campaigns, the GM may replace the High Technology advantage with an Unusual Background allowing the ASBs access to technologies otherwise not available. ASB nearsightedness is not subject to a Mitigator, so they get full points for it regardless of TL. The cost of High Technology assumes a campaign where the base TL is at least 6. ASBs need to be at least TL 9 (without easy interplanetary or interstellar travel, they'd be hard-pressed to be aliens, now, wouldn't they?), so in a lower-tech campaign, increase the level of High Technology as appropriate.

Master Bats have Possession (Telecontrol +50%) [150] and are likely to have high levels of Rank or Status.

suggested that alien space bats could have made a Nazi invasion of Britain successful. Since then it has come to signify any implausible background assumption. The term was intended as a rhetorical device, not a specific sort of entity, but that's not going to stop us. If there's something in a campaign which, on reflection, makes no sense, the alien space bats are probably behind it.

Pyramid Review

Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne

Published by [Guardians of Order](#)

Written by Patrick Brady, Joe Saul & Edwin Voskamp with Bob Alberti, M.A.R. Barker, Barbara Kennedy, Lisa Leutheuser, Jeff Mackintosh, & Victor Raymond

Cover by Raven Mimura

Illustrated by Llyn Hunter, Eric Lofgren, Jennifer Myer, Chris Miscik, Jesse Mohn, Torstein Nordstrand, Andrew Trabbold, & Ursula Vernon

242-page b&w hardcover; \$39.95

It is turning into quite the year for old games coming back as new -- *Werewolf: The Forsaken*, *Mage: The Awakening*, and *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*. But the oldest and strangest game to return is *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne*. The second RPG to be published and the first to come complete with its own background and setting, it was released by TSR in 1975. Finding a following, it has since rightfully acquired cult status. Bar no mistake, *Empire of the Petal Throne* is the niche gamer's niche game and the culture gamer's culture game. Yet it has never received the kind of support it so richly deserves, and when official rules were available, they were either heavy in setting with poor mechanics, or heavy on mechanics, but with little setting material. Which only raised expectations for Guardians Of Order's long awaited version. It has to satisfy the demands of the Tékumali (the fans), provide a starting point for the uninitiated, and it has to have both rules and setting. The question is: Can *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* achieve all that?

Actually, the first question that needs answering is, "What the hell is Empire of the Petal Throne?" Tékumel is the brainchild of Professor M.A.R. Barker, a linguist who has created a rich, ornate, baroque, and developed fantasy setting unlike any other. Instead of Western cultures, it draws on Mesoamerican and South East Asian societies for its look, feel, and cultures, as well as its languages. A humanocentric fantasy, *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* has five fully developed languages and others. Thankfully it is not necessary to be fluent in any one of them to play, but an appreciation of just one, Tsolyánu, will certainly help.

Set on the hot, metal poor and isolated planet of Tékumel in the distant future, what was once a vacation world has descended to the technological level of the Stone Age. The hide of the chlén beast replaces metal, constantly harvested and treated, then cut and lacquered in the right shapes for arms, armor, costumes, and so on. Over millennia, society has stratified, in which personal clan, lineage, and faith are very important. Everyone in the Five Empires knows their place, displaying it openly and showing deference for those above them; and studied indifference to those below them. Contempt is retained for those without clan or status, known as nakomé, with foreigners being in danger of being killed simply for the wrong display of manners. Further, on Tékumel, the gods are real -- sorcerers and priests can pierce the walls between dimensions and contact them, as well as cast magic. The pantheon is comprised of ten gods and their cohorts, divided equally between the Lords Of Stability and the Lords of Change.

In game terms, the focus is upon Tsolyánu, the Empire of the Petal Throne, with each player taking the role of a good clan member. Typical members would be dark skinned (Caucasians long ago having been killed in a nuclear war back

on Earth, and traits such as blue eyes are regarded as a curse), and dresses lightly for Tékumel's hot climate. He serves his clan loyally, often in a profession selected by his clan, marries according to the needs of his clan first and then taking a second wife for love, gives thanks and supplication to the gods faithfully, and is happy with his life. All Tsolyáni recognize the 10 gods and cohorts, but usually favors just the one, and there is no such thing as atheism. Alternatively he might serve a clan in an affiliated military legion, or become a priest, a scholar, or bureaucrat. He will advance as many ranks as his clan, status, influence, and connections will allow, but rarely beyond that for either merit or achievement. A good Clanswoman does none of this, her clan marrying her to enforce or create an alliance between clans. Some women are more independent minded, and by declaring herself Aridáni at the Palace of the Realm, she gains all the privileges and responsibilities of being a man.

Player characters are a little different. Female characters will of course declare themselves Aridáni. As a group they will perform missions for their family, clan, legion, temple, or even the Empire. This is likely to involve the characters in the politics at each of these levels. The classic set up for the genre has the players as foreigners or country bumpkins straight off the boat, which while an easy entry point for the uninitiated, is potentially dangerous for players considering the Tsolyáni attitude to foreigners. Instead the game suggests the characters belong to a single organization -- clan, legion and so on -- as a default set up. This is pitched at three levels of realism -- gritty realism, middle way, or heroic fantasy; the amount of magic in a campaign works on a similar basis -- none, a little, or common.

The degree of realism also determines the number of points available for character creation. The game uses Tri-Stat Derived, a modified version of Guardians of Order's Tri-Stat mechanics. Rather than the system's three stats (Body, Mind, and Soul) there are six: Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence, Psyche, Willpower, and Charisma, reflecting the uncinematic nature of the setting. The generic mechanic has been modified with an array of setting advantages and disadvantages, such as High Pedhetl (the ability to store extra-planar energy, useful for spell casters) or Low Status. The aim of the creation process is to build a character with a role or position in society, whether sorcerer-priest, duelist or clan arena champion, temple bodyguard, or chlén cart driver. Rules are provided for creating and playing some of the sentient species either trapped on Tékumel along with mankind or native to the planet. These include the flight capable Hláka, the insectoid Pé Chói, and the three sex, reptilian Shén. A later bestiary describes a variety of species useful or helpful to mankind, or inimical, such as the Ssú, known for their intelligence and cunning, and their pungent odor, reminiscent of cinnamon. Even so, this is a very humanocentric setting, although it is surprising not to see details of the N'lüss, giant barbarians from the North included.

The creation process is not particularly difficult and is eased by not one but two examples. Indeed, examples illustrate the rules throughout, making the rules easier to grasp in action rather than in the read. On a personal note, the pleasure of many these examples is that they involve characters that I know and are related to my own. The mechanics are simply a case of rolling a d10 to get under a total equal to the combination of stat plus skill, or combat value plus skill.

Where ***Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne*** really gets into its stride, is in presenting the setting from various points of view. Life is described in turn in a low, medium, and high clan, in the temples, military, and government, which where appropriate includes an in-person description. These add greatly to the flavor, and by letting a player read through them gives him a handy reference point. In fact, background is where ***Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne*** really scores, because along with a solid rules set, this serves as a decent primer to what is otherwise an ornate and alien setting.

Yet is not one without its weaknesses. Primarily this is the lack of depth to the GM's advice, which could go into more detail about setting up and running a campaign. Secondary to this the lack is ready-to-play material, which while not a problem for the long time Tékumali, could certainly help the referee new to the game -- perhaps sample NPC's and Clans? Also the book concentrates upon the Tsolyáni Empire, so anyone wanting information upon the other empires - - Mu'ugalavyá, Milumanayá, Sa'a Allaqui, Livyanú, and Salarvyá -- must wait for the future supplements. There is some information on them, but only from a Tsolyáni point of view.

Physically this sturdy hardback is laid out without flair and illustrated with a range of art that does not always capture the uniqueness of Tékumel. Some of it feels too clean despite the high nipple count, while other pieces pleasingly hark back to the pen and ink originals of the TSR 1975 rules. The fold-out full-color map at least does a good job and the writing feels more English than American.

At last ***Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne*** does something that no rules have ever done: provide background and rules in the same package. It does this very well in comparison to what was done before, but is only up to the expected standards of the day and no more. So has the wait for this book been worth it? Unquestionably it has been. Tékumel deserves to have a place on the gaming shelf and the patience of the Tékumali deserves rewarding at the very least. Not necessarily the standout RPG it deserves to be, ***Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne*** is nevertheless a well-deserved birthday gift to the setting, the game, and the fans.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Map Folio 3-D

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Model design by Dennis Kauth & Todd Gamble

Graphic design by Trish Yochum

32 full-color sheets of cut-out cardboard building components (tower, wall, two cottages, inn, outbuilding, & smithy); \$9.95

If you're big on using miniatures in your tabletop games, you probably have a large collection of figurines, a little something for every occasion, and for background, well...a selection of erasable vinyl maps imprinted with a grid of squares. Oh, and maybe a pad of paper sheets with the same design. To get things off the ground in a literal sense, you can use the *Map Folio 3-D*.

Simply put, it's a collection of little buildings that form a small village. A 32-"page" supplement, it supplies you with a tower, a generic stone wall with parapets, two cottages, a two-story inn, an all-purpose "outbuilding," and a smithy with a corral. You have to do the construction yourself, so at the very least you'll need knives or scissors and some glue or tape. The stock used is good, firm stuff, so if you just slap it together as is you'll have some pretty decent structures, but some of it benefits from added support (like gluing it to additional cardstock). The fences, posts, and corral bits for the smithy in particular require some fairly small cuts, and shoring those up is a good thing.

For the most part, these buildings don't offer much in the way of interiors. You can't get inside them once they're built, and with a few exceptions miniatures can't really "use" most of them -- guards can go on the walls, and the top of the tower can hold a few of your toys. On the other hand, the walls are a little larger than the squares required for *Dungeons & Dragons*, saving you from knocking stuff over as you move your miniatures. The scale is a little small given the figures that use them, but since no one has to be able to pass through the front door, it's close enough for government work. A sheet full of matching windows and doors is provided; this can be used to add a little texture to the structures once they're built, or ambitious folks can use them to model more functional apertures. Again, not strictly serviceable, but they'll look spiffier.

You won't find much fault with the illustrations. The graphic design is lovely, and some of it is downright impressive, like the moss/ivy growing up the side of the tower. Not much can be done about the vast areas taken up by various rooftops, but on the other hand there's a good bit of white space on a few of the sheets. It's not enough to make you choke on your store receipt, but it would have been fairly easy to put a few simple designs like a hedgerow there. They certainly thought nothing of using one sheet just to provide a "floor" for the smithy -- a useful template that shows where its chunks go, but none of the other pieces get their own front yard.

Or instructions. The inside back cover has some valuable safety tips for newcomers to making paper models, and some ideas on the best way to assemble the town, but hands-on advice is a bit harder to come by. Some of the more involved designs do have instructions printed directly on the sheet alongside their components, but these usually amount to a single sentence, and once you cut the pieces out you have to make sure you remember which pieces go with which instructions. A sheet of paper or two with rough illustrations would have been helpful, and even the buildings themselves could have replaced their generic "Tab" labels with some more specific information ("Smithy, Tab A," for example).

Once you've got them all together, transporting the buildings will be a whole new issue (another good justification for backing everything with an extra layer of stock). A hazard of this end of the hobby, of course, but you're going to have to schlep this stuff around eventually so best to think about it ahead of time. They aren't huge, but they can get kicked about in a grocery bag and they won't fit in your three-ring binder, so be sure to get a box.

While **Map Folio 3-D** is more scenery than anything else (as compared to customizable kits that form dungeon corridors and stairwells miniatures can actually dance around on), it's darn nice scenery and a whole lot better than simply asking players to once again imagine amazing things when you scrawl another dark line with a marker. Add to that the whole array is doggone cheap and you can buy several kits for the same price as a single roleplaying book, and you're well on your way to adding to your miniature arsenal in a visually aesthetic way.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

Wildwood (for *Oathbound* & *d20 System*)

Published by [Bastion Press](#)

Written by Thomas Knauss and Darrin Drader

Art by Bruce Colero, Christopher Pickrell, Jason Engle, Jeff Ward, Terry Pavlet, and Todd Morasch

Cover by Shawn Ye Zhongyi

256-page b&w PDF; \$19.99

Take one epic level druid champion of a god; overthrow said god and curse the druid and other deific servants to be bound immortal jailers of the god. Now add in the fact that the druid is full of unrequited love for one of his fellow jailers, the god's eternally loyal wife. Let him sit for millennia on the lifeless rock of the prison world and stew in his bitterness. Then give him the discovery that he can summon life to his portion of the prison world.

His reaction is to create a vast continent full of teeming animal and plant life, and to pit creature against creature to see nature as he likes it, red in tooth and claw. Super predators are encouraged and conditions are created so they will thrive and dominate their own territories. Sentient beings are brought in, sometimes entire cities, but cut off from the support of civilizations and left to see if they will adapt to barbarism and the state of nature or be overrun entirely and consumed. Trade collapses and is soon reduced to bartering for necessities. Some adapt enough to become serious predators themselves. Continue with the jailer druid as an alpha predator and voyeur of nature's primal struggles in his continent domain for thousands and thousands of years. He revels in his ability to pull in beings and creatures from a thousand worlds into his twisted bitter druid playground and see the ensuing struggles for survival of the fittest.

That is the big picture cosmology for the Wildwood continent in the *Oathbound* campaign setting, and it is a compelling and engaging background for a *d20 System* world. It provides a set up allowing for vast forests filled with dangerous beasts where survival is a prime concern. It allows more plausibility for the hordes of monsters juxtaposed in a standard fantasy game ecology and provides an in game reason for lots of sourcebook material to be used by a DM in one setting.

Instead of the default high level of trade in a standard *d20 System* world where characters can buy magic items and upgrade their gear relatively easily to their own tastes, the lack of trade means that equipment is more a factor of what the characters recover in their adventures. This provides a material incentive to explore newly discovered dungeons or overwhelmed transplanted cities for the loot they can acquire. The trade issue shifts more power to the DM in controlling character options through what magic items can be found, instead of PCs simply spending gold and choosing from their favorite supplement.

In addition to providing a playground for a DM to throw in various gaming elements, *Wildwood* provides a number of *d20 System* mechanical bits of its own as well. There are Oathbound races, many with racial levels. There is a revision to the original Oathbound Campaign's prestige race mechanics. There is a chase mechanic that uses opposed d20 rolls and maneuver and terrain modifiers instead of the staggered movement used in combat round resolution. There is a surgical skill based method of grafting monster parts onto subjects used by one of the predators. There are new feats, monsters, and magic, as well as a sample adventure. A new core class of feral warrior works along a Tarzan theme if

Tarzan had developed fangs and talons. There are little bonuses called gifts that empower those who get pulled into the setting. Other gifts can be used by the divine jailers to reward those who please them and their goals.

In ***Oathbound*** characters can harness the divine power of the world to mutate themselves to specific ecologic niches, becoming more predatory, bestial, draconic, plant like, smaller, larger, etc. Each such ecological path is called a prestige race. This was originally an xp for distinct powers system but is revised in Wildwood to be essentially racial levels driven by directed mutation that is available to characters of any race.

The different ecological realms of the continent as well as the communities, monsters, and individual dominant predators are detailed. Lost civilizations are provided with their history detailed for both before and after being pulled into Wildwood. Dragons and lycanthropes have flourished while elves and dover (nature oriented dog men) have adapted best of the good humanoids and established major communities. However even the elven archmage ruled society is seriously threatened by the toughest of the continent's 10,000 dragons who wages war against the elves, an advanced great wyrm green dragon who only falls shy of the divine druid jailer in power. Fey and treants are common but reflect the predatory nature of the world and are not good. The predator sections provide write ups of both full stats and histories for some individual top predators who range from CR 11 to 29.

All in all, ***Wildwood*** provides an engaging setting for a ***d20 System*** game with more emphasis on dangerous beasts and exploration without as much of the standard high magic item trading as civilized ***d20 System*** settings normally provide.

--*John Henry Stam*

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Information Flow: Court Politics

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

NOTE: This CiaB is slightly different -- it details a tool for constructing campaign plots, with a short worked example showing its use.

A technique that can come in handy for tracking who knows what when in an RPG is the *Information Flow Map* (IFM). An IFM shows the paths or channels that knowledge flows along between characters and groups (both PCs and NPCs). It can be used to determine how quickly important data progresses from person to person, as well as spark responses from characters to information as necessary.

The first illustration below shows a basic IFM, with four entities (A, B, C, and D) and two types of flow-channel (one-way in blue and two-way in red). The four entities can be individual characters (the vampire lord, the plucky girl reporter, the FBI department head, the gutter-dwelling pickpocket, etc.) or groups (the Wizards' Guild, the Goldfish Fanciers, the CIA, Starfleet, etc.). The flow-channels could represent normal conversation, a spy's dead letter drop, gossip overheard on the street, a furtive telephone call, orders coming down the chain of command, etc.

Flow Figure 1

As information flows along a channel from entity to entity, it picks up additional information, and may cause those entities to respond -- which in itself generates new information that percolates through the system. Information travels in different directions and at different rates, depending upon the channels (and types of channels) between entities.

Taking the basic structure shown in IFM1 above, the next illustration shows the movement of information through the system:

At each step, more information is gathered. While there can be a greater potential for error with each step, this structure assumes a certain amount of "clean signal." (GMs can feel free to introduce unreliable channels between entities to garble information, but at this point in describing the tool, doing so seems to be a needless complication; the structure itself will generate sufficient complexity on its own.)

Of special interest are **Step Four**, **Step Five**, and **Step Six**.

In **Step Four**, information flows out of entity D in three directions: towards A, towards B, and back towards C. This means that A, B, and C all receive the same information (info ABCD) at the *same time*. Additionally, immediately upon this



three-way split, the amount of information in this system has *tripled*, as becomes evident in **Step Five**, where there are now three distinct "packets" of data flowing (info ABCDA, info ABCDB, and info ABCDC). When these three packets flow again in **Step Six**, the feedback of the C to D channel and the three way-splitter effect of D mean there are *five* different packets of information floating around.

As more entities, more channels, more types of channel are put into the structure, and as more time passes, the complexity of the system and density of the information increases dramatically. Used wisely, this rich vein of data can be used to bring an RPG campaign to vibrant life.

Below is a worked example of such a complex IFM, much more intricate than the model above, suitable for a fantasy campaign.

[Click for a larger view](#)

The Court of Cats

Genre: Fantasy.

Style: Political Machination.

Theme(s): Information is Power.

NOTE: The details of world-building are left deliberately vague in this example, to permit the insertion of this worked example into any fantasy campaign.

What Everybody Knows

Here are the major players within the Court of Cats:

The Royals

The Pantera Dynasty has held the throne for over 400 years, having overthrown the previous Urso Dynasty.

King Warrel III: While still hale and hearty at 57, the complicated web of domestic and foreign intrigues has forced King Warrel III to begin relying more and more upon the counsel of his half-brother and Prime Minister, Duke Bartolo -- especially since the death of his wife five years ago. His current primary desires are arranging an advantageous political marriage for his heir, the Crown Princess, and protecting his youngest son -- Prince Gustavo -- long enough for the young fool to grow up. He directly commands the *King's Guard*.

Duke Bartolo: The Duke is the elder and bastard half-brother of the King (through their father, the old king) and Prime Minister of the realm (through his devotion and skill). Bartolo is a brilliant man with lightning-quick reflexes . . . and some say he possesses the gift of sorcery as well. However, he is loyal to both his half-brother and the law of the kingdom (despite his railing against the unfairness of legitimate succession in his early youth), and has proved his fidelity a hundred times over during Warrel's reign. He commands the *Minister's Eyes* -- an elite network of spies, informants, and assassins -- to keep the kingdom and the crown (and, interestingly and specifically, the Bastard Prince) safe.

Count Jolo: The Count is the brother of the late Princess Lianna, making him the King's brother-in-law as well as the uncle of Crown Princess Sianna and Prince Gustavo. His daughter is High Priestess Bergathel of the Holy Faith. Jolo is a fine figure of a man, younger than His Majesty, and known to be generous, cunning, and proud. He dotes on Prince Gustavo (moreso than his own daughter), and is an "elder statesmen" of the Prince's group of *Young Blades*.

Crown Princess Sianna: Eighteen and full of life, Crown Princess Sianna has learned the arts of rulership in the decade of peace supplied by her royal father. She is strong, nimble, and reasonably attractive, but still unready to take the throne herself, due to inexperience with deep subterfuge and wartime leadership. She directly commands her entourage of ladies-in-waiting and young female aristocrats (called *the Garden of Beauty*), and indirectly commands the loyalties and actions of the loose conglomerate of marriageable lords and officers informally known as *Sianna's Suitors*.

Bastard Prince Udolpho: The Bastard Prince's mother was of the lesser nobility, and died in childbirth; Udolfo was fostered by his maternal grandfather -- a minor Count -- until that worthy's death, after which he came to live under the protection of his half-uncle, the Duke. (Indeed, many took Udolfo for Bartolo's bastard rather than Warrel's!) At age 13, he entered the Royal University, where he made life-long friends with a few classmates and instructors. Upon his graduation, he was formally presented to his father and half-siblings for the first time. The King eventually recognized him as being (a bastard) of the blood royal and welcomed him as part of the family.

Bastard Prince Udolfo is 32, fat, intelligent, intensely charismatic, and mercurial in temperament. (It is also whispered that he shares his uncle's skill in the sorcerous arts.) He is known for his vast appetites for wine, women, and wizardry, and has had a succession of mistresses . . . but no children. He "commands" his group of *School Chums* -- former classmates and a few mentors -- as the first among equals.

Prince Gustavo: The only legitimate son of the King, Gustavo is 16, remarkably handsome, arrogant, and vain. He is bitter about the lack of trust in his (obvious!) abilities displayed by Warrel, resents the old man's constant meddling and "lessons" in royal comportment, and is jealous of the close ties his older siblings have with their father -- especially those between the King and his eldest, bastard son: Udolpho. He is the leader of a band of duel-happy aristocrats known as the *Young Blades*.

High Priestess Bergathel: Daughter to Count Jolo, niece to the King, cousin to Crown Princess Sianna and Prince Gustavo (she's also the Bastard Prince's step-cousin), Bergathel entered the clergy at in her youth. Interestingly, during her novitiate, she married for love rather than political purpose, causing some friction between herself and her father. Alas, after only a handful of happy years with her husband, she became a widow.

To deal with her grief, she threw herself into her duties in the Holy Faith, and eventually rose to the position of High Priestess (through hard work and dedication). Approaching 30 and eschewing fashionable fripperies, she is a handsome woman, known for her grace and charm. Her temple training has made her capable in all of the clerical arts, but her understanding of courtesy and manners is without peer. She directly commands the *Scholar Priests* of the Holy Faith, and attempts to protect the flighty young things of the Crown Princess' Garden of Beauty with her influence.

The Royal Entourages

The King's Guard: Only the bravest, most skilled, and most loyal warriors of the kingdom are recruited into the King's Guard. They serve as the personal bodyguards of the ruler and his heir, elite forces in wartime, and police forces in peacetime. They have a mild rivalry with the Minister's Eyes (well, the ones they know of -- i.e., the Duke's personal guard) over who keeps the realm safest, often find themselves dueling with the rash puppies of Sianna's Suitors and the Young Blades, and hunt down and dispatch as many Rebels and criminals of the Vulpo Clan as possible.

The Minister's Eyes: The Prime Minister has spies everywhere: the palace servants, local tradesmen, street ruffians, high courtiers, and even (some whisper) actual *assassins* number among his agents. The Minister's Eyes gather general information, discover secret plots, infiltrate dangerous cabals, and smooth the paths for royal policy. The "uniformed" members of the Eyes -- the Duke's personal guard -- are embroiled in a ridiculous rivalry with the King's Guard over who keeps the realm safest. (While the Eyes know the answer to this riddle, the competition keeps them sharp.) More than one Rebel has gone to sleep in his own bed, only to awake in the castle dungeons -- spirited into durance vile by the watchful Eyes.

Court of Cats Figure 1



[Click for a larger view](#)

The Garden of Beauty: Among the young females of the court, the honor of becoming part of the Crown Princess' personal clique is the greatest prize: within the Garden of Beauty, one serves the acknowledged Queen-to-Be. Not only rewarded by her friendship, these young ladies are assured of drawing the eyes -- and attentions -- of the richest, wisest, most chivalrous, and handsomest bachelors of the realm (especially Sianna's Suitors and the Young Blades). They also receive instruction and the advice of the High Priestess and her Scholar Priests: a formidable education for a woman in these times.

Sianna's Suitors: A group of the most eligible noble young men of the kingdom -- and even a few nearby foreign lands -- all have set their sights on wedding (or at least bedding) the beautiful heir to the throne of the Pantera Dynasty. However, they find themselves bound in mannerly camaraderie and good fellowship, for only one of their number can wed the Crown Princess -- and would it not be best to be friendly with the future Prince-Consort of the realm? Besides, even those who eventually lose the race will have had a chance to impress the Garden of Beauty, and many could do worse than end up with an attractive, young, wealthy noble wife. Unfortunately, so much masculine energy must find vent somewhere; this is usually in duels between comrades, members of the King's Guard, or some of the Young Blades.

The School Chums: A small band of the Bastard Prince's classmates and mentors at the Royal University (with which they retain close ties), the School Chums are all, in some way, brilliant: mentally, physically, spiritually, politically, or -- some say -- sorcerously. While not ornaments of courtly life, they will constitute the engines that drive the progress of the kingdom in the decades to come. While not fond of the young men of the upper crust (Sianna's Suitors and the Young Blades), they find the young ladies of the Garden of Beauty remarkable for their minds alone.

The Young Blades: These hangers-on of Prince Gustavo are indolent playboys, quick-tempered rakes, and stylish fops. They live for gambling, wenching, dueling, consorting with Rebels, and making snide comments about both their lessers and their betters. They attempt to woo the girls of the Garden of Beauty, which often brings them into conflict (sometimes armed) with Sianna's Suitors; their other activities are causes for "disagreements" with the School Chums and the King's Guards.

The Scholar Priests: The wisest and most steadfast priests of the Temple of the Holy Faith serve the High Priestess directly in many guises: bodyguards, research staff, advisers, and so forth. Under her direction, they help teach the Garden of Beauty the laws of courtesy and academic topics much more advanced than the basic education of the typical temple schools. They maintain excellent academic amity with the Royal University, keeping abreast of any and all new knowledge those intellectuals discover.

The Ambassadors

Captain Khelan: This foreign gentleman is in his early 30s and is athletic (an excellent dancer, horseman, and duelist), courteous, and rather handsome (in a dangerous and exotic way). His biggest vice is his love of gambling in any form; he is also openly friendly with the suspected criminal lords of the Vulpo Clan. He serves his liege abroad as ambassador to the Court of Cats. (He, no doubt, also performs espionage duties for his government, and probably employs a number of agents to do so.)

Lady Amira: This foreign lady is in her middle-twenties and extremely beautiful and refined -- though it is known she has a remarkable temper that sometimes breaks free and rages. She is a skilled singer, dresses impeccably, and possesses a substantial education for this day and age (especially history and politics). She serves her liege as ambassador to the Court of Cats . . . but seems to have personal designs on Prince Gustavo's affections! (Doubtless she also spies on the kingdom for her government, and it is an open secret that all of her "servants" are really her well-trained operatives.)

Other Interested Parties

The Royal University: As a group, the scholars of the Royal University seek out knowledge, both through dusty research through old tomes and the most cutting edge experimental laboratories in the kingdom. While some claim that the "new science" is just the "old occultism" costumed in new jargon, none can deny that many of the discoveries of the academicians (like the lost ballads of Queen Janice the Songbird, the new hues and new process of colorfast dying of linen, and the construction of the immense King's Clock in the University Tower) are pleasant, useful, or simply astounding.

The Vulpo Clan: A contentious tribe of crime families constantly jockeying for superiority over one another, the Vulpo Clan as a whole rules the underworld of the realm. Vulpo casinos, coffee shops, and bordellos offer the best (sordid) entertainments, which of course attracts the quality (Sianna's Suitors, the Young Blades, even the School Chums) in droves -- permitting the nobility to be separated from their cash. Unfortunately, these seedy enterprises do not sit well with the King or his Guards, so those of the Vulpo Clan must be alert for either mayhem or escape.

The Rebels: Someone's always unhappy with the way things are run, and within the realm (some say, within the court itself) that would be the Rebels. Mostly composed of vanquished -- but not yet toothless -- political foes of the King, these malcontents wish to see the throne filled by someone other than Warrel III . . . but they always seem to disagree on who should take the purple. They are constantly dogged by the King's Guards and the Minister's Eyes, which has taught this cabal some discretion. They wait, and watch, and meddle as they can.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

There are many secrets in the Court of Cats; here follow some of them.

Secrets of Captain Khelan

Captain Khelan is dedicated to the overthrow of the Pantera Dynasty, as well as the kingdom entire. Khelan's Agents have infiltrated the criminal Vulpo Clan, and by proxy, the School Chums, the Rebels, and Sianna's Suitors. This last group was perhaps the most interesting to the ambassador; so much so that he disguised himself (mayhap with arts occult) and became a leading member of the company -- the mysterious "Lord Rodrigo"! Worse, he has unexpectedly -- and against his own mission and self-interest -- fallen madly in love with the Crown Princess. He is torn by his need to woo her (in the person of a fictional aristocrat) and his duty to his liege lord (in his own person), but what can he do?

Secrets of Count Jolo

Simply, Jolo desires the overthrow of the King, the murder of the Crown Princess, and the ascension of Prince Gustavo . . . who he will influence strongly.

Secrets of Lady Amira

Lady Amira is dedicated to assuring the realm of the Court of Cats remains strong, and strongly allied to her homeland. To this end, Amira's Agents have infiltrated the Rebels (and thus the Young Blades), in the hopes of derailing or suborning them. She herself has entered a volatile relationship with the young Prince Gustavo (as well as secretly seducing a lieutenant of the King's Guard), all in the service of her country.

Secrets of the Minister's Eyes

The Eyes have infiltrated both Khelan's Agents and Amira's Agents and are remarkably well informed as to their activities. Furthermore, they have a modicum of intelligence about the groups that both Amabassadors' operatives have themselves penetrated: the Vulpo Clan, the School Chums, Sianna's Suitors, the Young Blades, and even -- gasp! -- the Rebels.

Additionally, by the direct order of Duke Bartolo, a contingent of Eyes secretly safeguards the Bastard Prince . . . a perk that is *not extended* to the Crown Princess or the young Prince. Does the Prime Minister trust the King's Guard to ward the royal heir, or is he playing a deeper game?

Secrets of the Rebels

The Rebels have infiltrated the Young Blades, finding in this rowdy lot of youths an excellent tool for toppling an aged and despised king.

Secrets of the Vulpo Clan

The Vulpo Clan have paid or blackmailed agents within the Bastard Prince's School Chums and the Sianna's Suitors; this is for leverage, since the odds are good on one of them taking the throne when the king kicks it. They also provide hidden protection for the Rebels, seeing them as the fall guys for initiating a succession. Because of this, they've lucked out: the Vulpos now have access into the Young Blades. This means that they can play all ends against the middle -- no matter which of Warrel's kids takes the throne, they have a handle on the new monarch.

Court Information Flow Map

Below is an IFM representing the way knowledge travels around the Court of Cats. Individual *people* are represented by white boxes, *organizations* are grey hexagons, and four different types of arrow represent *channels*, which are more complex than the simple ones in the example given earlier.

The flow-channels in the Court Information Flow Map are more complex than the basic model above. Each channel has different potentials for *transmitting* and *receiving* information. A blue line with solid arrowheads is a *full two-way* channel: information is transmitted and received equally (say, a group of Royal University members and Scholar Priests). A black line with one outline arrowhead and one solid arrowhead shows a *command* channel: information is *always* received towards the outline arrowhead of the commander (e.g., the Prime Minister), and only *sometimes* transmitted towards the solid arrowhead of those commanded (e.g., the Minister's Eyes). A green line with two bars and one sold arrowhead is a *protection* channel: information is *always* transmitted towards the arrowhead of those being protected (e.g., the Garden of Beauty), and only *sometimes* transmitted back towards the bars of the protector (e.g., the High Priestess). A red line with a solid square and a solid arrowhead indicates an *infiltration* channel: information is only ever received, and *never* transmitted. (GMs can feel free to come up with new types of channel for groups or characters they introduce -- for example, a College of Herald's that can only transmit information, or a telepathic communication method that permits info to flow to the next entity up the chain within the same **step**).

For how quickly knowledge disseminates around the Court of Cats, the *timing* of **steps** (see above, *IFM2*) is important. For this example, assume a **step** takes a full day; if GMs wish to alter the speed of information flow, they should read *It's All in the Timing* below.

Lastly, the people and groups that receive information will react to it in some way; their responses may affect the information as it is passed along, spark off new cascades of information movement, or present interesting potentials for characterization or action. See the *NPC & NPC Group Interaction Matrices* below for ideas to help shape how entities react to news regarding other entities.

Example of IFM Use: Sick Sianna

To illustrate how this Court IFM works, let us take the following example and see how knowledge flows around the gentry, and the sorts of reactions this could produce:

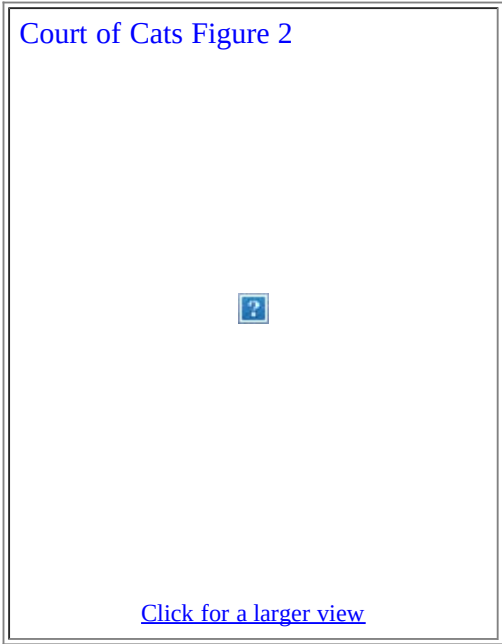
Step Zero: The basic situation is that Crown Princess Sianna has been grievously sick to her stomach each morning for the last three days. This info starts with the Crown Princess.

Step One: The info moves from Sianna to the King (mentioning her illness over breakfast), to the Garden of Beauty (telling her ladies-in-waiting that she feels unwell), and Sianna's Suitors (canceling a dinner party). Furthermore, since the King's Guards are protecting the well-being of Crown Princess, it's quite possible that they might have picked up the info through observation.

Step Two: The King tells the Duke and the Bastard Prince about Sianna's illness. The High Priestess discovers it through her overseeing of the Garden of Beauty, which has also passed the info along to the Young Blades. Through their infiltration of the Suitors, the criminal Vulpo Clan and Captain Khelan -- if he didn't know already as Lord Rodrigo -- both become aware of the sickness. (Lady Amira could also pick up this information through her infiltration of the Guards, but the GM decides that she's otherwise occupied for the day, and doesn't see her suborned lover.)

An interesting thing here is that the same information hits some entities *again* and feedback loops begin to occur: Sianna's Suitors have already heard of the illness in **Step One**, and now they heard it again in **Step Two** (from the Garden of Beauty); the King's Guards report the info to the King at this time, just when he might be readying an order to keep closer watch over the heir.

Rumors and gossip and confabulation and conspiracy theory in these situations are par for the course -- perhaps the Suitors get it into their heads that this is not the flu, but "morning sickness" . . . meaning that their object of affection may have already



selected a lover! The King puts additional pressure upon the Guards, because of the dangers of possible poisoning or secret premarital sex (after all, the family tree has an uncommonly regular habit to throwing out bastard branches).

The GM can intensify, dampen, or ignore any feedback that occurs, as he or she chooses.

Step Three: Count Jolo hears of Sianna's illness (there could be a potential for a misunderstanding between the Count and the High Priestess; since his channel with her is protection, he might not be listening to her, instead receiving the information through the Young Blades). The Bastard Prince tells his School Chums. The Duke tells his Eyes to start looking for evidence of plots against the royal family; the Eyes themselves have already gleaned the news by eavesdropping on the Bastard Prince. Prince Gustavo hears of his sister's infirmity from his Young Blades. The High Priestess orders the Scholar Priests to begin researching gastric diseases (and, to be safe, to brush up on obstetrics).

Khelan's Agents are in the know, because of the orders of their principal and their infiltration of the Vulpo Clan. The Suitors ask pointed questions about the Princess' affections to the Garden of Beauty (since none of them have gained Sianna's affections, could it be one of the Young Blades?). The Rebels hear of the possible weakness of the heir from two sources: their infiltration of the Young Blades as well as the guidance of their Vulpo bankrollers (sounds like the time to launch a plot against the royals!). Though delayed, Lady Amira has met with her Guardsman lover, and now knows the info.

Step Four: The Eyes report that the Khelan's Agents know of the sickness. Prince Gustavo tells Lady Amira (who already knows, though she hides this); Lady Amira informs her Agents (who have just discovered the info through their moles in the Rebels), and issues orders to her lover in the Guards to admit her into Sianna's chambers (cue sting music!). The High Priestess receives preliminary reports from her Scholar Priests, who -- in parallel with the School Chums -- are picking the brains of the academics of the Royal University. The Suitors get shocked feedback from the Garden of Beauty; "Lord Rodrigo" is particularly wound up about the possibility of Sianna having a lover which isn't him. The Young Blades hear of the insinuations of the Suitors via the Garden of Beauty, added to Count Jolo's decidedly offended mien, they are spoiling for a fight with the cads who have cast such aspersions . . .

An obvious event at this high-tension point would be a huge free-for-all melee to break out between the Young Blades and the Suitors; the presence of any other groups (the Garden of Beauty, the Vulpo Clan, or Sianna herself) is purely optional.

The cycle can start all over again with the death of one of the combatants -- an innocent young nobleman, son of a wealthy foreign Duke -- that will cause its own ripples in the system.

PCs Do What?

The IFM above does not take into account the actions of PCs. *An IFM is simply a tool to be used to provide **them** with setting details and adventure opportunities.*

At any point, the PCs could radically redraw the IFM with ease -- by not transmitting information to other parties, by ignoring information they receive, by ferreting out and killing infiltrators (or entities), by delaying or distracting entities, by unmasking spies and agents, etc.

This is a *good thing*: GMs should not view an IFM as an inviolate, permanent document: the course of a campaign will and should alter the NPCs and groups involved.

NPC & NPC Group Interaction Matrices

NPC Interaction Matrix

x	BP	CJ	CK	CP	DB	HPKW	LA	PG
BP	x	-	-!	+	+	N	+	N (-!)N (-!)
CJ	-	x	N	+ (-!) N (-) +!	N (-!)+	+	+	
CK	N (-!)N (-)	x		N (+!)+ (-) +	+ (-!)+ (-)	N (-)		
CP	+	N (-!)N (+)	x	+	+	+	- (-!) -	
DB	+	+ (-) N (-!)+!		x	+	+	N (+) N (-)	
HP	N	+	N	+	x	+	-!	+
KW	+	- (-!) N (-) +!		+	+	x	+	(N) + (-)

LA + (N) + + (-) N (-!) N (+)-! + x +!
PG -! +! + - - (-!) + + (-!) +! x

Key

BP = Bastard Prince Udolfo
 CJ = Count Jolo
 CK = Captain Khelan
 CP = Crown Princess Sianna
 DB = Duke Bartolo
 HP = High Priestess Bergathel
 KW = King Warrel
 LA = Lady Amira
 PG = Prince Gustavo
 + = Likes
 +! = Ally
 - = Dislikes
 -! = Enemy
 N = No Opinion
 () = Secretly . . .
 x = Null Value
 GB = Garden of Beauty
 KG = King's Guards
 ME = Minister's Eyes
 RB = Rebels
 RU = Royal University
 SC = School Chums
 SP = Scholar Priests
 SS = Sianna's Suitors
 VC = Vulpo Clan
 YB = Young Blades

x GBKGMERBRUSCSPSSVCYB

GB	x	+	N	-!	-	N	+	+	N	+
KG	+	x	-	-!	N	N	N	-	-!	-
MEN	-	x	-!	N	-	N	N	-	-	
RB	N	-!	-!	x	N	N	N	-	+	+
RU	N	N	N	-	x	+	+	-	N	-
SC	+	N	+	-	+	x	+	N	+	-!
SP	N	+	N	-	+	+	x	N	N	+
SS	+	+	-	N	-	N	N	x	+	-!
VC	N	-!	-!	+	+	+	N	+	x	+
YB	+	-	N	+	-	-!	+	-!	+	x

PC Opportunities

In a political campaign like the Court of Cats, the PCs have plenty of opportunities to get involved: as members of any of the factions, as factionless individuals trying to join (or being wooed to join) a faction, as double-agents for a principal, or even as the trusted servants of one of the people in one of the factions.

Of special note is that not all groups mentioned above require that the PC or PCs be part of the high aristocracy. Lesser- and non-nobles could easily be a King's Guard, a Royal University fellow or student, a School Chum, a Scholar Priest, a Minister's Eye, a Vulpo Clansman, a Rebel, or an Ambassador's Agent.

Possible Seed Events

Here are several seed events to start the flow of information in the Court of Cats:

Find that Bastard!: The Bastard Prince and his valet have disappeared from their usual haunts (including Udolfo's palace chambers) without a trace, right from under the noses of the Minister's Eyes.

The Wound's Tale: During a duel, "Lord Rodrigo" of Sianna's Suitors is wounded in the arm. Later, one of the Young Blades notices that Captain Khelan seems to have a spot of blood on his shirt in nearly the same place.

The King is a Fink!: The Rebels are planning a massive act of vandalism or sabotage to make the King look weak and foolish.

Strangers in the Court, Exchanging Glances: Duke Bartolo and the High Priestess begin a secret affair.

The Judas Guard: One of Khelan's Agents discovers the identity of the King's Guardsman who has been suborned by Lady Amira.

Where's My Two Ducats?: The Vulpo Clan begins putting pressure on Prince Gustavo to pay off his vast debt at one of their gambling dens.

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

THEME: Information is Power

A key feature of political and conspiracy games is that knowledge is power. Knowing the right thing, at the right time, and in the right place or with the right access, can allow an individual to cause great events to happen or gain enormous rewards or achieve their goals with much less effort than otherwise. This is a perfect position for PCs to try to get into, and the IFM tool provides both a map and a method for the GM to help put them exactly there.

Using & Not Using the IFM

The most important aspect of using an IFM in a campaign is to know when to follow it, when to change it, and when to ignore it utterly. It is just a form of brainstorming and background-generating tool for GMs. It should in no way replace actual game-mastering or subordinate the actions the PCs.

While some GMs might not want to use an IFM during play at all (reserving it for out-of-game plot generation for upcoming sessions), it is a handy tool for quickly figuring out a large number of NPC responses to PC actions during a session. If the PCs light Count Jolo's apartment on fire (accidentally, m'lord, I swear it!), it'd be good to know who in the court will glare at them, who will laugh at them, and who will ask them some quiet questions about how they escaped from the inferno when all the doors and windows were blocked by flame . . .

Note, however, that good GMs have learned that having a hammer in hand doesn't make everything a nail.

It's All in the Timing

By adjusting how long a step is (that is, how long it takes for information to flow through a channel), a GM can pace how quickly NPC responses to PC actions unfold. If a step is only a minute, things move fast indeed; if a week, events and reactions to them may slow to a crawl. For most games set in pre-modern times, one day per step is reasonable; for modern periods, twelve hours per step is often adequate; for post-modern times, an hour is equitable (quick enough to reflect high-tech communication, slow enough to permit suitable reactions). A vague period of "dramatic time" (or *scene*) is always appropriate.

Listen well, and have a care regarding when you speak -- for you never know who'll be listening, or what use they'll put that information to. Discretion is the hallmark of the successful courtier.

Other Resources

The design of the information flow diagrams here were influenced by the relationship maps of Ron Edwards' [The Sorcerer's Soul](#) (Adept Press), the Community Behavior Map of [Gamma World d20](#), and my own Plot Skeleton Worksheet in Atlas

Games' [Weep](#) and the Scenario Skeleton design found in Atomic Sock Monkey Press' [Dead Inside](#).

Excellent general information on in-game political intrigue can be found in Chris Aylott's [Dynasties and Demagogues](#).

* * *

Special Thanks to Matt Rhodes, Tom Schoene, and Jon Zeigler for their comments.

Foreseeing Unforeseen Consequences

A couple of days ago in the news, I read that implementation of red-light cameras in Colorado resulted in an [83% increase](#) in the number of accidents. In other words, an attempt to make people safer seems to have placed them considerably more at risk.

Sadly, this isn't a sole exception in the automotive world. In the 1990s, when they raised the speed limit here in the States from 55 miles per hour to 70 on selected road, they discovered that accidents went down. If I recall correctly, I think it was because the number of people causing accidents because they were going 15 miles over the speed limit went down, since they really didn't feel the need.

(As a random aside . . . on my drive home, there's a sign right by my apartment that says "WATCH CHILDREN." For some reason, I have an irresistible compulsion to add my own commentary on this sign whenever I see it: "WATCH CHILDREN roll across the hood like raindrops.")

Anyway, the real world is full of decisions that resulted in unintended or unintuitive consequences. Many of the anecdotes in the "unintended" column result in outcomes the opposite of what was desired; for example, the United States' CAN-SPAM act, designed to curb e-mail spammers, resulted in a huge surge in junk e-mail production. Other times, these decisions seem ironic or shortsighted, looking back. As one anecdote, the motion picture industry fought tooth and nail against VCRs when they first appeared, fearing that people would stop going to movies if they could record their own off television. (Does anyone remember the days when it cost \$100 or so to buy a movie on video?) Today, the same movie companies make *much* more off home video sales than they make in the theatres . . . and, as I understand it, they're making more money than they did back in the pre-VCR days.

Still other times the results can be far-reaching and fairly bizarre. For example, the weak "encryption" methods of the standard CD led to the ability to extract music files from them over a decade later, which led to MP3 players, which resulted in Apple Computer's single most high-profile and high-profit product line in a decade, quite possibly saving the company from obscurity or worse. (If the Macintosh doubles its market share in the next decade or so, it will have the CD's insecure format to thank for a fair chunk of that.)

Personally, I find this gulf between the intended and the actual result to be fascinating. However, in fiction the effect is somewhat rarer, partly because it requires knowledge of both the expected and actual result. Before you can show that a law against womprat racing resulted in more womprat racing fatalities, you need to first describe the perils of womprat racing, establish that people desire a decrease in womprat accidents, and then describe the efforts to solve the problem (unsuccessfully).

However, it's not impossible. The most recent (extended) example I can think of is from the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy, where the senate that voted to surrender its freedoms to preserve and protect the republic ended up with a government that was neither preserved nor safe.

As a meta-example, the first season of the television show *Head of the Class* had the teacher challenging his gifted students with scenarios like these. He'd hold up a baseball and say, "A baseball started the Cuban Missile Crisis." And, through his students' incredulity, he would explain that in the 1950s Fidel Castro was up for a pitcher's position for the Washington Senators, but he failed to make the team; this failure freed him up to go back to Cuba and overthrow the government, becoming the leader that formed a third of the near-explosive equation during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

However, it's a technique that, once I started thinking about it, isn't all that difficult to envision as being useful for RPGs. All that's required is to envision a outcome you desire (from a game standpoint), think of an unlikely spark, and then connect the dots.

Let's start with an easy one.

An Attempt To Cure a Failing City Causes It to Fall Further

Let's say we want Gotpork City to be depressingly dangerous and bleak, having descended into corruption and poverty. What's an unlikely way of reaching that point? Well, the city is poor, so what if an attempt to get money into the city backfired, resulting in less money? With that in mind, we devise a scenario: Decades ago, Gotpork officials noticed the city was sliding downhill, and something drastic needed to be done. To do so, the Gotpork officials permitted casino gambling within the city; the thinking was that taxes on the casino would bring in needed revenue to fix things.

Things worked okay for a bit. Unfortunately, it turns out that the people most likely to gamble in Gotpork were those in dire economic straits. As a result, they lost money, and started turning to crime. This criminal element resulted in the industries remaining within Gotpork not feeling secure, causing them to go elsewhere, taking their tax revenues with them. As a result, Gotpork ended up with *less* money than before . . . plus a dangerous criminal element, and a reliance on the casinos for the meager money that remains. We've got ourselves a perfect backdrop for a gritty noir game.

An Attempt to Aid Humanity Has Unexpected Consequences

Let's go for a harder one. We want to end up with a supers campaign where the relationship between metahumans and regular folks is more strained or unusual than normal. In trying to think of an example, I considered: What's one way humans might get super powers? Well, medical means (drugs or surgical procedures) is a way that hasn't been widely used as a campaign-wide origin. And what's one way that medical means might result in supers? Perhaps as a side effect from a medical cure . . . such as a cure for cancer.

And I have my inspiration:

Monoloxin 87-144 had won legal approval in use as a promising treatment cure for cancer, and was in use for several months before the first report of . . . something odd. Its effectiveness was in the high 90-percent range, but after six months of treatment some patients began reporting of unusual abilities. While the world and media were still reeling from the implications of this discovery after several weeks, an unknown person (the authorities have yet to disclose who) launched a full-scale telekinetic attack against Chicago. After the death of thousands, the person was eventually killed (the exact method of which is also unknown). The pieces were put together, and a direct causal link was established between Monoloxin 87-144 and the formation of super powers; scientists place the percentage of those so imbued at about 1% of those who took the drug.

After the Chicago attack, the government halted all production and distribution of Monoloxin 87-144. They also began interrogating and researching those who had taken the drug, trying to determine who was the most dangerous; this, in turn, caused many who had undergone the treatment (both with and without powers) to go into hiding, lest they end up in legal limbo in a government hospital for months.

Heroes are those who have taken the drug and gotten powers. They are distrusted by the public, hunted by the government, and especially despised as a symbol by those who have cancer and are unable to receive treatment to save their lives.

So we've taken something that was to be a great boon to humanity -- curing cancer -- and turned it into a negative with unchosen consequences.

It's an interesting technique, and one that I'm looking to apply to future projects. Assuming, of course, that I don't get into a car accident before then because of techniques designed to keep me safe.

--Steven Marsh

Charcoal and Charcoal Makers

for *GURPS*

by S.E. Mortimer

Introduction

This is another in our series about medieval professions. This one is about charcoal and charcoal makers and can be used in conjunction with "[Woodlands and Woodcutters](#)." The charcoaler often worked closely with the woodcutter, and the two professions were closely intertwined. This work refers to *GURPS* supplements such as *Low-Tech* and will endeavour to remain consistent with *GURPS* material when possible.

Charcoal is a black, porous product consisting almost entirely of carbon obtained by roasting wood (or other carbonaceous materials such as cellulose, peat, bituminous coal, or bone) in a low-oxygen environment. This process, called *pyrolysis*, prevents the wood from burning to ash, drives off most of the water content, and reduces many of the organic compounds to carbon, resulting in a fuel that is much lighter than wood, and burns cleaner, hotter, and at a known, controllable temperature. Charcoal contains much more energy per pound than wood. Freshly cut hardwoods can contain 30% water and conifers can contain 40% or even more. Seasoning will reduce water content to around half that amount, making it more suitable for use. As mentioned in *Low-Tech* (p.LT39), freshly cut hardwood contains around 7,000 kWs of energy per pound. A pound of seasoned hardwood contains around 8,200 kWs. Charcoal is a much more efficient form of fuel, containing around 13,000 kWs per pound. It is also easier to transport charcoal because it is much lighter than timber. Wood fires can burn at around 1,200°F but can be "flashed" up to around 1,500°F with straw or pine twigs. They also produce large quantities of ash and smoke. A charcoal fire burns at around 1,200°F without a forced draft and is much cleaner, without producing much smoke or fumes. If air is forced into a charcoal fire (e.g. using a bellows), temperatures can reach 1,800-2,000°F, and this is hot enough to melt copper. In an insulated furnace, temperatures can reach more than 2,200°F, which is hot enough to smelt iron (slag becomes fluid at around 2,100°F and can be drained off, leaving the iron "bloom"), but not hot enough to melt it (pure iron melts at 2,800°F). When smelting iron, charcoal also acts as a reducing agent to chemically release the iron from the ore.

History

Charcoal has been the universally preferred industrial fuel from the Bronze Age (TL1) through to the 18th century (TL5). The earliest pieces of charcoal so far tested have been carbon-dated to around 3500 B.C. Charcoal was used as a fuel in the smelting and working of metals, the drying of hops for brewing, and the production of glass; in the manufacture of gunpowder, soap, and medicines; as a purifier of food and water; and as a black pigment for ink, paint, crayons, and so on. More recently it has been used as a filter to purify water and remove odors (some gas masks use it). Barbeque fuel is another major use today. Some of the by-products of charcoal production include tar, creosote, methanol, formaldehyde, and acetic acid. One liquid called *pyroligneous acid* was used by the Egyptians in their embalming process. Another by-product, *carbon disulphide*, was used in the first half of the 20th century in the manufacture of artificial silk.

Charcoal forests were often "coppiced" (see below) to make the woodlands more productive, thus enabling a more sustainable charcoal industry. It has long been thought that the demand for charcoal was such that in areas like Great Britain, the woodlands were all but destroyed. Legislation was passed to limit the cutting of mature trees for the charcoal industry, which implies that timber clearing by some charcoal burners could get out of hand. Often, however, the opposite was true, and forests located near iron industries were better protected because of their economic value. These timber resources were jealously guarded and so were not cleared for pasture/agriculture or sold off to settle debts, as happened in many other areas. Even today, some countryside located around historical iron producing sites are among the most densely wooded areas in England.

Coppicing

Coppicing is described in detail in "[Woodlands and Woodcutters](#)." Charcoalers preferred coppice timber because it was of regular size, easy to handle and load, and required minimal trimming. Wood to be used for charcoal was generally cut during early spring before the sap started to rise. It was then trimmed to lengths of between two and four feet and stacked in cords to season for several months.

Coal (Mineral Coal)

Until the 18th century charcoal was far more dominant as a fuel than mineral coal. In 1603, Sir Henry Platt first suggested that coal might be charred the same way that wood is charred to form charcoal and in 1642, coke (coal which has been roasted to drive out volatile constituents) was first used as a fuel to roast malt for the brewing industry in Derbyshire. In the following century, coke started to be used for iron smelting and soon overtook charcoal as the preferred fuel. It was initially called "sea coal" because most of it was found on beaches, having washed up from exposed seams. A Bronze Age corpse was cremated with coal in South Wales, and the Romans used coal along Hadrian's Wall to heat homes, barracks, and baths. It was very rarely dug from the ground in the Middle Ages, but one instance of it being mined was by the Monks at Margam from the middle of the 11th century. In Leige near Belgium there is also documentation indicating that coal was used for smithing as early as the 11th century. Mineral coal replaced wood coal in the smelting industry for several reasons. One was the lack of timber resources for charcoal but the main reason was cost. Coke required much less labor to produce than charcoal and is about five times more efficient as a fuel for smelting iron. The disadvantage is that mineral coal often contains impurities (e.g. sulphur) that result in the iron being of a poorer quality (more brittle, etc.) than that smelted with charcoal.

Coal miners were originally called "hewers" and their work required great skill. During the Elizabethan period, they were paid craftsman's wages. Usually a single man worked a coal face, pushing the coal behind him as he excavated a gallery along the seam. A common method was to first dig at the rock underneath the seam, undercutting it. This task involved lying on one's side and using wedges, short-handled picks, and hammers. The hewer pushed the rock debris behind him and this was cleared before the coal was dug. Using wedges, hammers, and a crowbar, he worked upward into the coal seam, attempting to break out the coal in pieces as large as possible. This "great coal" was worth much more than "small coal" because it was easier to transport and burned more efficiently. Coal and debris was carried to the base of a mine shaft where it was carried up ladders, if the distance was short, or hauled out with a windlass. The same windlass was used to transport personnel up and down. The number of laborers required to move the coal and debris was normally significantly more than those who were actually digging at the coal face.

Charcoal Making

The first method for producing charcoal probably involved the "pit kiln," in which wood was slowly roasted in a shallow pit covered with soil. More efficient and more manageable above-ground kilns developed later. Charcoal burning usually took place very near to where the wood was cut. Since the best conditions included dry weather and little wind, it was usually attempted from late spring through early autumn. Hardwoods like oak, ash, maple, chestnut, and hickory were the best types, but nearly any kind, except resinous trees like pine, were acceptable. Aged, dried wood was the best. The final volume of charcoal is up to 50% less than that of the initial timber and final weight is around 25%.

Pit Kiln (TL1)

This is a primitive method of making charcoal but is still used today in some countries. It was created by digging a pit and stacking the wood in a particular

A Sample Temporary Shelter

One type of temporary shelter used by charcoal makers consisted of a tepee made from a wooden frame covered with turf. This two-man hut was about three yards in diameter with a frame of 16 vertical poles between four and five yards in length, and six horizontal poles lending additional support. A doorway

order to allow the correct amount of air flow as it burned. The stack of timber (the "charge") was lit and then covered with dirt and leaves. A small area was left uncovered to act as a smoke vent. Pit kilns are fairly inefficient since the burn is difficult to control. Some timbers burn to ash while others are hardly singed, so the final yield of each burn is lower than above-ground methods (see *Yields*, below). A pit kiln burn usually takes longer than above-ground methods, but it depends upon the size. There are two general categories: small and large.

Small Pit Kilns: These might produce enough charcoal for a small smithy but is impractical for larger volumes. This pit kiln is usually around 1 cubic yard in size and can only be used to burn a charge of small, dry cuttings. Once the pit is dug, it is partially filled with timber. A fire is then started and more timber is added to fill up the pit. The smouldering mass is then covered with leaves and soil to a depth of at least 1 foot, leaving a hole for ventilation. After a few days the top is removed, water is added to prevent flare-ups, and the charcoal is allowed to cool before collecting and sieving to remove soil. Charcoal was then graded. Large pieces went to the iron workers and smaller pieces went to other industries including the domestic market.

Large Pit kilns: These pits can be up to 30 times larger with a corresponding increase in throughput, and they can handle large logs and a little more moisture content. A good design is roughly rectangular in section with a sloped floor. The charge of timber is placed on a crisscrossed crib of logs to raise it above the ground, enabling gas to circulate underneath. The charge is lit at one end and the pit is covered with leaves and soil several feet deep. The burn occurs gradually down through to the timber at the lowest point of the pit at the far end, which is where the ventilation flu is located. Animals and humans should be kept away during the burn to prevent accidental falls. It takes three to four weeks for a large pit kiln to complete a burn. It is then uncovered and left for an additional month to allow it to cool. The charcoal is removed with rakes and forks.

was left facing the charcoal burn so the charcoal maker could keep an eye on it. Sacks were placed over the framework and leafy brushwood twigs were stuck into the weave to help hold the turf. The turf was laid, grass side uppermost, onto the fabric and twigs, starting from the ground and working up to the apex. A porch, giving headroom and shelter from the rain was brought forward when the poles were first set in position. Inside the hut, on either side of the porch, two platforms were constructed from stakes and sprung brushwood. These were covered with a mattress of leaf- or grass-filled sacks. Additional sacks provided a curtain for the doorway. When the charcoal maker was ready to move on, he would dismantle his hut and use the sacks to store his charcoal, ready for sale.

Charcoal Clamp (TL2)

A more advanced method of making charcoal is the above-ground "forest kiln," also known as a "clamp" or "pile." The first step in building this was the placement of the centre pole, called a "motty-peg" or "fagan." The fagan, approximately four inches in diameter, was surrounded by a triangular chimney made of split wood. Splints were then placed around the chimney in vertical rows which flared out at the base to provide the proper pitch. The fagan was removed and hot embers from a fire was poured down the hole. Upon firing, the clamp was covered with leaves and soil. If the burn proceeded properly, it burned downward and out. The clamp had to be carefully watched and controlling the airflow was a delicate matter. Too much oxygen could cause the clamp to catch fire, too little would result in an unsatisfactory burn. Long-tined charcoal rakes were used to rake the already produced charcoal from the top and sides while the rest of the clamp continued to burn. Depending upon the amount of moisture and types of wood used, a burn could last from 3 to 9 days, plus an additional day or two to cool down.

Brick Kilns (TL4)

These are permanent structures made from brick and as such, can only be employed in an area that has a constant supply of timber. This usually involves a reliable method of transportation such as a nearby river (or rail in later times) since the timber supplies in the local area will be quickly exhausted. Brick kilns are actually not much more efficient than pit kilns but they allow a larger volume of wood to be more safely processed. Burns in these kilns usually take a couple of weeks. Another advantage of this kiln is that the charcoal was protected from rain which could ruin charcoal

produced outdoors.

Steel Kilns (TL5)

These work in a similar manner to brick kilns except that they are made of steel and are usually portable. They are taken to the timber rather than vice versa, and the burn is completed in about a week.

Retort Kilns (TL6)

This is an indirect method of burning charcoal in which an external heat source (usually some sort of furnace) is used to roast the charge, which is contained in a closed, but vented, airless chamber (called a "retort"). Retort kilns require less skill and attention than other methods of producing charcoal while, at the same time, producing a higher yield of better quality charcoal with less smoke and pollutants. The charcoal costs more to produce however, because fuel is needed for the indirect heat source (the furnace).

Yields

It depends on the species of wood but typical yields, using seasoned timber, are as follows:

Type of kiln	(TL)	Typical Charge	Yield	Efficiency	Duration
Pit Kiln (small)	1	2,000 lbs	200 lbs	1:10	1d-2 days
Pit Kiln (large)	1	100,000 lbs	10,000 lbs	1:10	3d+10 days
Clamp	2	50,000 lbs	8,000 lbs	1:6	1d+3 days
Brick Kiln	4	200,000 lbs	25,000 lbs	1:8	2d+6 days
Steel Kiln	5	20,000 lbs	4,000 lbs	1:5	1d+3 days
Retort Kiln	6	20,000 lbs	5,000 lbs	1:4	1d+1 days

Less efficient methods have a lower yield because there is less recoverable charcoal. More of the final product is either ash or timber that has not burned properly (called "brands"). The brands can be reused next time but timber that burns to ash is wasted. An acre of coppiced native forest contains 20-25 cords or about 80,000 lbs of useable timber. For a sustainable industry only about 5-10% of that could be harvested each year (allowing 10-20 years for regrowth). So an acre of woodland could produce, on average, about 6,000 lbs of seasoned timber per year. Looking at the Yields table above, pit kilns would produce 600 lbs of charcoal, brick kilns 750 lbs, above-ground clamps 1,000 lbs, steel kilns 1,200 lbs, and retort kilns would produce 1,500 lbs of charcoal per acre each year.

The Charcoal Maker

This professional was very common from the Bronze Age right through to the end of the 19th century. The charcoal maker had many names including "charcoal burner," "charcoaler," or "wood collier." Like woodcutters, the charcoal maker was often near the bottom of the social ladder and owned few possessions. When a tree was cut down the charcoaler didn't take the primary limbs (these were sent to the sawpit or sawmill to be dressed and sold for carpentry work) but only used secondary limbs and branches. The charcoal maker's life was itinerant during the burning season which could last up to six months. During this time he lived in the forest in temporary shelters. When not working he returned home to his family. Some took their entire family with them during the burning season. The charcoal maker was totally reliant upon the weather. A persistent rainy or windy period would prevent work and

The Charcoal Burn

Roll against Wood Collier skill and apply the following cumulative modifiers:

- +1 very suitable timber (oak, maple, beech, hickory, chestnut, etc.)
- +1 little wind is likely during this season.
- 1 using a pit kiln rather than an above-ground one
- 2 unsuitable timber (softwood conifers such as pine)
- 2 attempting the burn alone (no assistants)
- 3 strong wind is likely during this season.
- 1 for each additional burn after the first one (e.g. 3 simultaneous burns has a penalty of -

result in no income.

The charcoal maker had to be on hand at all times to monitor the burn. If the burn proceeded too slowly, holes would have to be cut at various spots in the clamp to improve airflow. A sudden increase in the wind could force excess air through the footings of the clamp, thus causing it to burn too fast. When this happened, the wind had to be blocked with hastily-erected screens. The amount and colour of the smoke indicated how the burn was progressing. Initial thick clouds of greenish steam should gradually subside to a steady trickle of white smoke as the wood dries out. During the next stage, chemicals in the wood are given off and the smoke turns a yellow/brown colour. Thick, black tar deposits around the vent holes are another indication that the second stage has been reached. If the smoke is blue, it means that there is too much airflow and the wood is burning too fast. It must be quickly controlled, usually by shovelling on more soil or pouring water on it, to prevent the entire clamp from bursting into flames. Blue (or sometimes pink) smoke can also indicate that the burn is finished and all of the timber has been converted to charcoal.

The charcoaler has the professional skill, Wood Collier (IQ/Average). This skill involves identifying suitable timber (either buying or gathering it), building the kiln (pit or pile), adjusting the airflow to control the burn, and collecting the charcoal after the burn is complete. If the charcoaler has at least one assistant he can manage multiple burns at once (maximum of 15). This is determined by his skill level. At 14+ he can handle 3 burns simultaneously with one assistant. For every additional skill level he can handle two extra burns if he has additional assistants (one per 3 kilns). For example, a Master Wood Collier (skill level 20+) can manage 15 simultaneous burns provided he has 5 assistants. A successful skill roll (see text box, right) produces the yield listed in the above table (see *Yields*, above). Other useful skills include Area Knowledge, Survival (Woodland) since he lives in the forest during the burning season, Lumberjack (a Professional skill suggested in "[Woodlands and Woodcutters](#)"), and Merchant to find and exploit markets for his product.

Hazards: One dangerous task involved "jumping the pile," which was required if the clamp wasn't burning evenly (see textbox, right). Other hazards include inhalation of toxic fumes, explosions from trapped gasses collecting inside, and accidents caused by tiredness (the burn had to be watched 24 hours a day).

Cost (GURPS \$).

Fuel was expensive. Even before it was converted to charcoal, firewood cost around 8 shillings per cord or \$160 (see "[Woodlands and Woodcutters](#)"). It is difficult to find historical prices on charcoal but it is probably better to extrapolate using our suggestion for the cost of timber. A typical medieval charcoal maker would only be able to handle one burn at a time. Assuming that he uses an above-ground clamp which takes 1d+3 days to burn, he

2)

**Sample Result Table
(for above-ground "clamps" only)**

Critical Success:	The burn finishes in only 3 days and most of the charcoal is excellent quality. Increase the yield by 10%.
Success:	The burn finishes in 1d+3 days. Each point of success increases the yield by +1%.
Failed by 5 or less:	After a couple of days you realise that too little air circulation is preventing the timber from burning properly. You must start again but may reuse the same timber.
Failed by 5 to 10:	Too much air circulation caused the clamp to burn too fast, ruining the batch. You must act quickly to prevent the fire from spreading to the surrounding woodland. If not, fire licks your heels as you flee for your life.
Critical Failure:	Poor air circulation caused a build-up of volatile gasses, resulting in an explosion. All those within five feet of the kiln take 2d damage. All those within 20 feet take 1d damage. Quick action is also needed to prevent a forest fire.

Jumping the Pile

During some burns in the first 24 hours, the charcoaler had to climb on top of the smoking mass of timber to compact it, thus helping to create a more even airflow. This action is required when the character makes his skill roll exactly (i.e. succeeds by 0), and requires a successful roll against DX+2 or Climbing+2. Failure results either in burns (1d

would be able to produce around two batches per month if he had an assistant to help prepare the ground, gather the wood, build the clamp, rake, sieve, and bag the finished charcoal, and so on. Two burns is an average figure -- if the weather was perfect, he might manage three or even four batches in a month, but some months would see one or even *no* burns being successfully completed. A cord of seasoned firewood costs \$160 and weighs approximately 3,500 lbs (weight varies depending on species). A typical clamp uses 50,000 lbs of timber or around 14 cords. Two burns each month for six months (12 batches) uses 168 cords of timber with a resale price of about \$27,000.

damage) or falling damage (from a height of 10 feet). A critical failure means that the character has fallen *through* the top of the pile into the burning mass below. The sudden inflow of air causes the pile to flare up dramatically, resulting in 3d damage from the fire *plus* falling damage from the ten-foot height.

Each 50,000-pound batch of timber yields about 8,000 lbs of charcoal for a total of 96,000 lbs per year. Using the **Low-Tech** wages as a guide (p.LT8), we will assume that the charcoal maker pays himself about \$2,400 per year (\$200 per month) and his assistant is paid \$960. To break even the charcoal must be sold for $\$27,000 + \$2,400 + \$960 = \$30,360$. This works out to be about \$0.32 per pound. Charcoal was usually measured in bushels (about eight gallons). A bushel of charcoal weighs around 20 lbs and there are about 50 bushels of charcoal in a cord (8' $\times$ 4' $\times$ 4'), so a bushel of charcoal costs \$6.32 and a cord costs \$316. Other costs to be borne by the charcoal maker are the purchase of sacks, tool maintenance, food, etc. A good rule of thumb is to determine the price of firewood, which in this instance is \$160 per cord and then *double* it to estimate the price of charcoal, i.e. \$320 per cord. If charcoal sold for any less than this, then it would be more profitable to simply gather up the timber and sell it as firewood. \$320 seems a reasonable price if the product didn't have to be transported. Transportation costs could be worth more than the initial cost of the charcoal, which is why industries that needed large amounts of charcoal tried to locate close to the fuel source. An upcoming article will cover the amount of charcoal needed for industries such as iron smelting and smithing.

Woodlands Requirements

Looking at our example of a single charcoal maker and his assistant, they would require 588,000 lbs (168 $\times$ 3,500 lbs) of timber each year. If an acre of coppiced growth can sustainably yield about 6,000 lbs per year, then our team would require the timber from 98 acres of woodlands to work throughout the burning season in a sustainable fashion. Given that there were thousands of charcoal makers working at any one time, it is difficult to imagine the vast tracts of forest needed to feed the medieval demand for fuel.

Further Reading

- Wikipedia entry -- [Charcoal](#)
- Charcoal glossary -- <http://www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/projects/charcoal/terms.htm>
- Charcoal burning -- <http://www.regia.org/charcoal.htm>
- Japanese charcoal -- <http://web-japan.org/nipponia/nipponia19/en/topic/>
- Wood Energy Conversion -- http://wgbis.ces.iisc.ernet.in/energy/HC270799/RWEDP/i_conversion.html

GURPS Accelerator

Interview-Based Character Creation

by Thomas Weigel

*This is the first in a regular series of articles on how to speed up your **GURPS** game and make it easier to play.*

Character creation in **GURPS** is . . . well, it's detail-rich. Many potentially excellent players are scared off by the wall of three-column text they have to scale before they get to a character sheet, but there is a way to get rid of this barrier.

This article provides a toolkit for interview-based character creation. Using this approach, you will act as a go-between for the player and the rules, writing down a character sheet from the "real world" descriptions of the player.

I've broken the toolkit into four sections:

- **Method:** How to act as an interface between the player and the system.
- **Ignoring Stuff:** Information the player doesn't need to know yet.
- **Asking Questions:** How to find out what your player wants to play.
- **Presenting the Character Sheet:** How to make the character sheet easy to understand.

Method

There are three methods to interviewing a player about his character. The more involved you are, the better results you will get.

The GM as Decision-Maker

This is the simplest method. Ask the player to describe his character, take notes, and then translate the character into rules from those notes.

The advantage is that it is the fastest and easiest solution (short of pre-generated characters). For a time-pressed GM, making the decisions may be the best option.

The disadvantages are that the character rarely matches exactly what the player wanted, the player still doesn't understand the character sheet, and the player is no closer to being able to create his own character the next time around. To avoid these problems, you need to become a guide.

The GM as Guide

Take the player's initial description and then ask specific questions. Is your player's cop character a beat cop or highway patrol? Is he a skilled veteran or fresh out of the academy? We'll assume he's good at his job, but is he good at it because he has a strong intuition, a logical mind, an intimidating presence, or something else? If he's a veteran, is he still in good shape?

This creates a closer match to what the player wants, and allows you to introduce the idea of characters with strengths and weaknesses. ("For this campaign, I'd prefer you weren't good at *every* cop activity -- pick two?") However, the

player is not closer to being able to build his own character next time. If that's a goal for you, it's time to become a teacher.

The GM as Teacher

To be a teacher, introduce the rules the player will need while you are discussing his character. If you are adding a skill -- for instance, Intimidate at 12 -- take a few moments to explain it:

"Okay, this skill represents how good you are at intimidating and bullying people. A '12' is roughly professional skill, but still a bit away from expert. Any time you want to intimidate someone, you will be rolling three six-sided dice and trying to get a total that is 12 or less. Sometimes the situation will make it harder or easier, but we don't need to worry about that right now."

Each explanation should be simple, and to the point. Don't get into a discourse about how influence rolls in general work, or what a skill of 10 means, or the nature of circumstance modifiers. Tell the player just enough to understand the concept of "Intimidate at 12."

Who Writes It Down?

Some players (particularly kinesthetic and visual learners) learn better if they write down the character during the creation process. Others (particularly auditory learners) will learn better if you write down the character for them. This prevents them from being distracted when they're trying to listen.

The easiest way to find out is to ask the player which approach he would prefer, and then change it later if that doesn't seem to be working.

Ignoring Stuff

GURPS is an intricate system. Explaining one rule often brings to mind exceptions and "context" rules. It's easy to overwhelm beginners with too much context, so avoid it by skipping over concepts that the player doesn't need to know yet.

Ignore Point Totals.

Tell the player if he's getting too outlandish, too powerful (or weak), or if his character is starting to sound too much of anything in particular. However, don't get bogged down in whether he can be a professional janitor when he only has 3 points left to spend.

As long as all the players have the abilities they want to have, the system can support a wide range of point totals between player characters. If every character's point total is within 25% of the baseline point total for the campaign, the PCs will be balanced enough for most campaigns. The wider the variation in point totals, however, the more important it is to make sure that one PC's field of expertise doesn't overshadow another's.

If you want to maintain a strict balance of point totals among the PCs, take the character with the most points and give everyone else enough unspent points to bring them up to that character's total points. The players may use these points later, when they understand the system better.

Ignore Most Advantages, Disadvantages, and Skills.

Hard to Kill is fun, but for a beginning player, a high HT is much simpler to understand. Danger Sense is nifty, but don't ask the player if he wants it unless it is central to his concept. A first character should consist of broad strokes.

Ignore Skills That Everybody Has

In a campaign of police investigators, ask the player what aspect of police work he is particularly good at, but don't ask him how good his character is at every single skill a police character would have. Ask him how competent his character is, set *all* of the skills at that level, increase a couple of skills that the character is particularly good at, and move on.

Ignore Anything That Exhausts You or Your Player

In most cases, a beginning player is willing to take a "default" option for anything not central to the character concept. Use this willingness to keep the time involved in character creation as short as possible. You and your player can always adjust the character later.

Asking Questions

A structured set of questions eases the process of translating ideas into statistics. Here's the questionnaire I use.

Ordering Your Questions

The **GURPS Basic Set** is ordered in the way that is convenient if you are using points to create a character. When a player who is trying to get a character idea across, though, skills are generally the first thing to come to mind. Most character ideas don't start with "12 hit points and Combat Reflexes," but with "history professor with combat experience."

Start your questions by asking about skills. Once you have the skills and skill levels, you can reverse-engineer the attributes, Talents, and other advantages needed to reach that level. This requires some mental gymnastics on your part, but it makes the process much easier for the player.

Ask about attributes after skills. Advantages and disadvantages come last, determined by what the player wants to play and how you want to reconcile skills and attributes.

"What Skills Are You Good At?"

Ask the player what skills the character has, and how good the character is at those skills. Keep in mind that the player doesn't know the skill list -- you will need to translate "Beat Cop" into "Area Knowledge (Local), Current Affairs (Regional), Detect Lies, Hiking, and Intimidate." (For more ideas, see Wildcard Skills, under Presenting the Character Sheet.)

Also, instead of making the player choose a number for skills, provide a series of descriptions and set the skill number based on that description. Most PC skill levels fall into these five categories:

- *Almost Incompetent*: assign this skill an 8.
- *Competent*: assign this skill a 10.
- *Professional*: assign this skill a 12.
- *Expert*: assign this skill a 14.
- *An Expert's Expert*: assign this skill a 16 (or more).

"How Strong is Your Will? How Perceptive Are You? "

The average result of the skill levels will give you an idea of how smart the player wants the character to be. Use the IQ that is most point-efficient for the skill levels the player chose. Then ask the player how strong-willed and perceptive the character is, and adjust those two sub-attributes to match.

As with skills, use descriptors to set Will and Perception. These vary by campaign, but the following range works in many games:

- *Average*: Unless IQ is unusually high, leave this the same as IQ. Some brilliant characters may have Will or Perception reduced to a 10 or 11.
- *Strong-Willed* and/or *Perceptive*: Set the appropriate characteristic to 11 or IQ, whichever is higher.
- *An Iron Mind* and/or *Eagle-Eyed*: Set the appropriate characteristic to 12 or IQ, whichever is higher.
- *Lantern-jawed Action Hero*: Set Will and Perception to 14 or IQ, whichever is higher.

"How Strong Are You?"

Strength is an easy concept for most players to understand, but these descriptors make it easier.

- *Weakling*: Assign a Strength of 8 or 9.
- *Average*: Assign a Strength of a 10 or 11.
- *Athlete / Heavyweight*: Assign a Strength of an 12 or 13.
- *Super-heavyweight*: Assign a Strength of a 14 or 15.
- *Power lifter*: Assign a Strength of a 16 or more.

"How Athletic Are You?"

Due to its cost and importance in play, Dexterity uses a narrower range of descriptors and attribute assignments than Strength.

- *Not Athletic*: Assign a Dexterity of 10 for all but the clumsiest characters, who get a 9.
- *Typical*: Assign a Dexterity of 11.
- *Athletic*: Assign a Dexterity of 12.
- *Very Athletic*: Assign of Dexterity of 14.

"How Healthy Are You?"

Instead of focusing on descriptors, give the player characters what they need to survive. Most PCs should receive an HT of 11 or 12. Assign a 13 or 14 to player who wants to play an unbreakable character, and a 9 or 10 to a player who wants to play a sickly character.

Suggesting Advantages & Disadvantages

Rather than ask an exhausting list of questions designed to suss out exactly what sorts of advantages and disadvantages the character should have, listen to the general type of character the player is trying for, then suggest one or two appropriate advantages and disadvantages.

In most cases, this will be sufficient. When it isn't, the player (once given the germ idea from the suggestion) will be able to make an intelligent suggestion which you can then turn into an appropriate advantage or disadvantage.

Quirks

When dealing with beginning players, treat Quirks as personality traits instead of rules. If the player is playing a naïve, fresh-from-academy beat cop, he *has* a quirk, and the GM's complicated version of the character sheet should represent that . . . but if the player thinks it is a system element, it will occupy the part of his mind concerned with mechanics, and make it seem that much more byzantine.

Most players roleplay quirky characters as a matter of course. If the character truly has no quirks, a suggestion to the

player that the character needs something "unique, to distinguish him from all the other action cop show protagonists" will usually fix it quickly.

Presenting the Character Sheet

Once the player has answered your questions, you can finish the character sheet. You can use the standard sheet, or a simplified version that will cover only what the player needs to know. (An example of simplified character sheets will appear in the next GURPS Accelerator article.) These last four tools can help you make the character sheet easier to understand.

Sets of Three

Taxonomic division is one of the most basic mnemonic devices. Where possible, divide the character sheet into sets and subsets of three or less. It is easier to remember that your character is a Professor and a Psychic, *and* that "Professor" includes the elements of Status, Perks, and Patron, *and* that "Psychic" includes the elements of Intuition, Illuminated, and Psychometry, than it is to remember that your character has Intuition, Illuminated, Patron, Perks, Psychometry, and Status.

Wildcard Skills

The Characters book says that wildcard skills are for cinematic games, but it's also great for NPCs, pre-generated convention characters, and beginning players. A wildcard skill doesn't have to be cinematic or omniproficient. In fact, it can be very specialized. What makes a wildcard skill useful is that it cuts down the size of the character's skill list to something the player can digest and remember.

Instead of handing a player a sheet full of professional skills, try a wildcard skill like "History Professor! (Medieval Europe, IQ+0) Part politician, part publisher, you know how to survive and succeed in the cut-throat world of grants and non-tenured teaching. Also includes some actual teaching skill, and a considerable body of historical knowledge."

This skill includes aspects of Administration (academic environment), Fast-Talk, Accounting, History (Medieval Europe) -- everything a history professor should know to be good at his job. Most players will have no trouble applying different aspects of a broad professional skill to game situations.

Meta-traits

Meta-traits are the "wildcard skill" for advantages and disadvantages, because they don't just have to be for races! For example, "Professor (Status +1, various Perks, Patron/University)."

As you put the list of advantages and disadvantages together, look for common elements that you can group them by. In some cases, it will be suggested by the player! A player who wants to play a professor will say so, and many of that character's advantages and disadvantages can go in a meta-trait called "Professor."

Don't try to capture every aspect of a meta-trait at once. Instead, add 5 to 10 unspent character points to the trait. The extra points can be spent later to fill in any aspects of the trait that were left out during its creation. (If you don't need the points after all, they can always be allocated to something else later.)

Quirks

Whenever possible, put the PC's quirks in the descriptive elements of the character sheet. A mathematician who has a Cuban-cigar habit might have a quote under his name extolling their virtues. A naïve beat cop might have that mentioned in his character summary. A character who is archetypally nerdy (but only has the *disadvantages* Skinny and Bad Sight) could have a "nerd" meta-trait.

Tucking the quirks away in these places makes it difficult to figure out how many points the character gets for them, but much, much easier to remember. Adding quirks to the list of disadvantages, on the other hand, makes point calculations easier, but violates the "Sets of Three" rule.

The Noble Art of Scavenging

by Jody Macgregor

Designing your own scenarios from scratch is not easy, nor is it the kind of thing everyone enjoys. On the other hand, if you fork out the cash for published scenarios they often require significant changes before they can be played -- details need to be altered to fit your player's dispositions, their character's abilities and the mood of your game. It can be almost as much work as writing your own. The harried, poor or plain lazy GM has a third option: scavenging.

It's easy to forget that roleplaying is as much about sitting around cracking jokes and munching junk food as it is about the noble art of storytelling. Nobody in their right mind holds their GM up to the same standards as their favorite writers or filmmakers, and shamelessly stealing plots and characters is a time-honored tradition both of roleplaying and the genre fiction most roleplaying games seek to emulate. All you have to do is go about your scavenging in the right way. Most importantly, only scavenge that which is universal or obscure.

The Universal

Take a creature inimical to human life, add a group of mistrustful victims, place in a confined environment, and stir. You've just cooked up the bug-hunt, one of the commonly used universal plots. It's the plot of the *Alien* series, *Pitch Black*, *The Thing*, several episodes of *The X Files*, Games Workshop's *Space Hulk* and *Tyranid Attack* games, and every session of TSR's old *Bug Hunters* roleplaying game. Running a bug-hunt is easy; players should recognize the clichés as soon as they see the first mutilated corpse and catch a glimpse of It scurrying down a ventilation shaft or tunnel.

When utilizing a plot as archetypal as the bug-hunt all you need to do is fill in the blanks. What is the danger? Perhaps a bizarre alien species, a doppelgänger, a pack of werewolves, or a rogue spellcaster changed into something twisted and insane by a magical accident. Who are the victims? Obviously the heroes, but if death, betrayal, and horror are on the cards then a few expendable NPCs will be in order. Consider letting your players control an additional character for the session, someone untrustworthy or unnecessary you can kill off with impunity or who the players can use to backstab their friends without repercussions for their beloved characters. What is the environment? A space station, a boat far out at sea, a high school, a dungeon. The dungeon could work well; usually the PCs are the powerful invaders hunting weak and disorganized prey through the tunnels, and turning the tables is always fun for the sadistic GM.

Some other universal plots to jumpstart your imagination include the hostage situation (as seen in *Die Hard* and *The Negotiator*), the siege (*The Thirteenth Warrior*, *Night Of The Living Dead*, and most typical zombie movies), the murder mystery (countless Agatha Christie and Sherlock Holmes stories), the production that must go on (*Moulin Rouge!*, Terry Pratchett's *Maskerade*, Jack Yeovil's *Drachenfels*) and more others than I can be bothered to list because S. John Ross has [already done it for me](#).

The idea behind scavenging universal elements for use in your games is to pick a set of clichés, or genre assumptions if you prefer, which everyone will recognize and happily play to. There's no point throwing together an orphan, a prophecy, and a magical sword if it's going to make your players groan and throw dice at your eyes. Clichés are useful only if they convey a mood and suggest ways to react to the situation; everyone knows that trying to escape from the environment of a bug-hunt immediately is futile, but trying it anyway gives the victims something to do while the bonds of trust break down and the body count rises. If the players try to escape but aren't too disappointed when they fail, you'll know you've hit your target.

Where there are clichés, there is subversion. Occasionally undermining your own clichés keeps the players on their toes; say, by beginning the murder mystery with the guests discovering a body in the parlor and being locked in until the killer is discovered, then turning it into a bug-hunt instead.

So much for the universal plot, now on to the universal character: the stereotype.

Sure, you can fall back on making a sensitive and artistic elf or a doomed and angst-ridden immortal if you're lazy, but I'm talking about the kind of stereotypes real writers use, the character you can find in half a dozen different stories with a different name. One favorite example is the likeable rogue. This cynical guy may be a bit unorthodox and live on the shady side of the law, but underneath it he's got a heart of gold. There's a dark secret in his past, but he'll be redeemed in the end when he risks himself to save the more pure good guy despite being caught up in a love triangle with him and Miss Perfect. Han Solo, Rick from *Casablanca*, and Cassidy from the comic book *Preacher* all fit this stereotype to a T. Remove the heart of gold and you've got Pablo from *For Whom The Bell Tolls*.

The best stereotypes to use when you're creating an NPC on the fly are those that come with not just personality, but story arc and relationships attached. The likeable rogue in a ***Dungeons & Dragons*** game has an obvious role to fill around the paladin of the party -- start suspicious, gain his trust by helping out in dangerous situations, cement the friendship, start looking for a love interest to compete over.

Other stereotypes should be easy enough to spot, but here are a few to start you off.

- The wise old mentor who is more powerful than he seems; Obi-Wan, Yoda, Splinter (from *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*), Gandalf.
- The tormented genius falling past the boundary of sanity; Max Cohen (*Pi*), that guy Russel Crowe played in *A Beautiful Mind*, Dr. Frankenstein.
- The grim and determined bringer of justice; Dirty Harry, Batman, Captain Vimes from the *Discworld*..

The Obscure

Before stealing a universal plot, you have to file off the serial numbers and reduce it to its basic elements. When what you're stealing is obscure you can be more blatant about recycling the specifics, if you judge it right. As roleplayers we tend to have obscure tastes to begin with, otherwise we wouldn't be in such a cul-de-sac of a hobby. If one of your players is a cinephile with an exhaustive knowledge of old movies, obviously you shouldn't go scavenging in the Classics section of the video store. Learn your player's tastes -- you may be surprised at the fiction people privately consume, especially if it's in a form with a degree of social stigma attached like soap operas or comic books. Know your players.

For instance: my players don't watch cop shows, so I gleefully cobbled a plot from an old episode of the English police procedural *The Bill*. In this episode the detectives tracked down a couple of hijackers who'd stolen a truck full of cigarettes. Investigating by harassing fences, known hijackers and sundry dodgy characters, the detectives noticed a strange trend -- each of the people they interviewed was sporting a recent injury and each pretended it was caused by an accident. It became apparent that someone else was following the same trail, only half an hour ahead of and with a lot less subtlety in their information-retrieval technique, leaving a trail of broken arms and black eyes in their wake. When the cops finally track down one of the hijackers, they're too late. He's been murdered, his grieving girlfriend having just discovered the body. She tells them where the loot is hidden and the cops arrive ahead of their opponents for once.

The rival investigators turn out to be drug smugglers who were using the cigarette truck as cover and are more than a little upset that somebody stole their stash. The smugglers show up with the second hijacker in tow to collect their gear and all the villains get nicked. Roll credits.

It would be a cinch to steal this plot if I was running *GURPS Cops*, but I wasn't. I was running *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*. After exchanging London for a Border Prince city hunkering down for a siege as an Orcish army approaches, switching the cigarette truck for a shipment of ale (everyone's stocking up before the roads are closed), and swapping the drugs for a hidden cache of weapons which half-orc revolutionists were planning to use when they seize the gates and let in their brethren, and putting the PCs in the place of the coppers, I had one week's game. Sorted.

This may sound like as much work as converting a published scenario. On the other hand, it was free and I didn't have to read a darn thing. Once you get the hang of swapping stormtroopers for Orcs it becomes second nature to turn

everything you see into fodder for your next game.

Pyramid Review

Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra (for the *d20 System*)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by C. A. Suleiman with Steve Kenson & Ari Marmell

Cover by James Ryman

Illustrated by Toren "MacBin" Atkinson, Kent Burles, Jennifer Meyer, Ben Risbeck, Beth Trott, & Mike Vilardi

Cartography by Ed Bouelle

Boxed Set with one 96-page, one 64-page, & one 56-page b&w softcovers, & 22"×17" full-color map; \$39.95

Surprisingly, one of the few historical periods to have been ignored by the *d20 System* is that of Ancient Egypt. Thus the appearance of *Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra* is a welcome one for that reason, and more. The others being that it is a Green Ronin release, who are known for the quality of their *d20 System* supplements, and that it is part of their Mythic Vistas line, which to date has produced some very good supplements.

The most obvious thing about *Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra* is that it is not a single book, but a boxed set containing three books and a poster map . . . something of an oddity in this day and age. As you would expect for a Green Ronin publication, presentation standards are high, and where the artwork is not good, it is exquisite. Unfortunately, the cover illustrations are not as good. Barring the odd typographical error, the writing is of course, excellent.

The first thing you need to know about *Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra* is that it is not a supplement about Ancient Egypt. Rather it presents a setting based on Ancient Egypt into which the fantasy elements of the fantasy *d20 System* have been worked. Thus this is not Ancient Egypt with fantasy bells and whistles, but a setting in its own right. The second thing you need to know is that the area presented in this box lies on the same world as [Freeport: City of Adventure](#) along with *Mindshadows'* Naranjan, and just like those islands, this Ancient Egypt analogue lies several months' journey across the sea, known only to a few, and purported to be a land of exotic riches, customs, and magic to anyone else.

The setting for *Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra* is Khemti, also known as the Black Lands, created and peopled by the gods, and then scorched by Ra into a wasteland as punishment for their errant ways. In the millennia since, the people have come to rely on the life-giving, irrigating waters of the Yor River. In ages past, during the Old Kingdom, the land was one, but religious differences split it into two: Upper and Lower Khemti. It has been reunited since, but more recently it has split into three kingdoms. The northern Lower Khemti, the Set-worshipping Upper Khemti or Shematu, and the Middle Kingdom founded after a slave revolt of Ptahmenu (dwarves). Currently it acts as a buffer state between the antagonistic Upper and Lower Kingdoms.

Although the gods no longer walk the land, their creations do. The greatest of the gods in turn created six races that each worships their originator. The Asari, or halflings, are the creations of Osiris; the Esetiri, or elves, were created by Isis; and the Ptahmenu, or dwarves, are the creations of Ptah, the Great Creator. The dark god Set created the Sutekhra,

gnomes; while the gnolls or Anpur are the children of Anubis, and unlike the other divine races mostly reside in the deserts of the Red Lands. Humans -- or Pesedjer -- are a compromise, having been created by all of the gods, and so do not favor any one deity. Another divine race is the crocodilian Sobekhi, the creation of the once-powerful water god, Sobek. More common long ago, currently the Sobekhi survive as nomads and bandits. Peseshet, or half-elves, are not unknown, but where the other races share the same traits with those found in the *Player's Handbook*, variant rules allow for the immediate offspring to share traits with the dwarf, gnoll, or gnome father. Absent from Khemti is the half-orc, the gnoll appearing to take its place, though in a far more civilized fashion and with slightly different trait adjustments. Any of the divine races can ascend to the position of pharaoh, though they must possess the Divine Heritage feat.

As with the races, *Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra* essentially renames the base *d20 System* classes instead of creating them anew. Some have appeared elsewhere in the Egyptian chapter of [Testament: Roleplaying In The Biblical Era](#), such as the Kheri-Heb, or wizard. While there are plenty of new Prestige Classes given, it also lists those suitable from the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and the publisher's *Master Class* series. The new include the Deathblade, concerned with ensuring proper respect for the dead; the swift, silent desert raider known as Red Scorpions; Serpents Dancers who base their combat skills on the movement and lethality of the snake; and the master dreamers, the Dream Shapers. Dune Walkers are mystics dedicated to protecting life in the desert; Lector Priests undertake the important role of reading from the ritual books; Priests of Ma'at are seekers after truth and knowledge; while the Spell Eater is literally able to steal the magic of spellcasters!

The changes to magic are to some extent cosmetic, reflecting cultural differences rather than nuts-and-bolts tinkering. Magic is still divine or innate (arcane), but is also granted ("Akhu") or learned ("Heka"), and all but innate Akhu is seen as a gift from the gods. The magic of the Kama'at (or druid) drawing instead upon the energy of the cosmos. Actual rules detail the ritual and ceremonial nature of Khemtian magic, as well as its need for foci. Knowledge of an object or person's true name will also give a spellcaster or diviner a strong advantage, although discovery of such information is a monumentuous task in itself. While some new clerical domains are offered, the Alignment domains are not found here, and Fate replaces the Luck domain.

All of this is covered in "Book One: The Book of Days," while the second and third books are slightly slimmer. "Book Two: The Book of Gates" covers the people and lands of Khemti, along with its politics, cosmology, and topography. Included are relationships between the Black Lands' cities and how such rivalries are played out and resolved in the arenas. Although all are accorded good descriptions, only Khemti's premier city, Hamunaptra is given a map. The book also describes all of the gods in the Khemtian pantheon, each very nicely depicted. So are the descriptions, though naturally, no statistics are given.

Besides the new Prestige Classes and monsters suited to the setting, "Book Three: The Book of Law" looks at running a Khemtian campaign. Obvious campaign themes involve the military, politics, and religion, relations between the land's three kingdoms being difficult, barbarians threatening to attack from out of the desert, and the watching hostile nation of Khesh to the South. But Khemti is also a land of history and secrets, with plenty of opportunity to explore the ancient ruins and tombs of dynasties past. In addition, various secret societies all have plans for Khemti, including allowing the desert to finish encroaching on the fertile lands along the Yor River, restoring a monotheistic faith to prominence (another historical analog), and uncovering fragments, remnants, and knowledge of the country's past. Although 100 scenario suggestions are listed, the secret societies are the perfect campaign hooks in themselves.

What is so enjoyable about *Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra* is that it does not tell you how to run an Ancient-Egyptian-style campaign under the *d20 System*. Instead it presents an Ancient Egypt-like setting, heavily influenced by the history, that stands on its own, which can optionally be used in conjunction with *Freeport: City of Adventure*. It fuses the historically familiar with the fantasy familiar from *Dungeon & Dragons*, and importantly, it does that without the seams showing. Although the boxed set might be dead, *Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra* is proof that the contents do not have to be.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

My Dwarves Fly

Published by [Pegasus Press](#)

Designed by Sebastian Jakob & Michael Palm

Developed by Lutz Stepponat

Illustrated by John Kovalic

Edited by Jan Christoph Steines & Andrew Dawson

Four wooden pairs of player tokens in four colors, 40 gold counters, game track, 88 cards, four review cards, & rules; full color & boxed; \$24.95

You know it, you love it, your character's gotta have it. It's gold, and the only thing the Red Mountains are thicker with than the beloved yellow metal are the people willing to fight for it. *My Dwarves Fly* takes you on a quest to get more than anybody else.

The object of the game is to be the first one to gain 15 gold.

Players take turns drawing their initial five-card hand. There are two decks to choose from, one containing creatures and the other the events and abilities that spice up game play, and players may choose however many they want of either. If you concentrate on creatures, you won't be able to boost their powers or shift events unexpectedly during diplomacy. Choose too many of the events, and you won't have any creatures with which to win the battle.

During a player's turn, he can play a new creature, play an ability on a creature already out, discard a card, or start a battle. Creatures are your basic units. Everything from "mundane" dwarves and elves to more fanciful things like dragons and gorgons may form your army, and some of these may have inherent abilities. Gnomes, for example, are better at finding gold, whereas the doppelganger can duplicate another card in play. Watch out for aversion -- some beings don't like working with others, like orcs and dwarves. If you have a goblin in your group, he'll leave if you play an elf (and vice versa). If too many of one type of creature are brought into play (such as the orcs), *all* the dwarves in play on anyone's team leave. Abilities played on units boost or lower their power. These are usually critter-specific, so you can play "My Gnomes are Greedier" if you have Gnomes in play, or "My Elves Don't See a Thing" if your opponent has Elves.

Once you have a few beasts out, you'll want to pick a fight to get something for your troubles. When played, a Battle Card calls all players to the field to argue over the latest cache of gold. The card indicates how many creatures each player is required to bring to the donnybrook; if you haven't enough to fill the quota, you still have to go in undermanned (or underelfed, or...).

The Battle Cards also tell you how much gold is at stake. Each creature is worth a certain number of six-sided dice, from one to five. To get your Battle Strength, you'll roll each critter's dice individually and add them together. For every "one" that comes up on the dice, your team gets to add one more gold to the stash they've uncovered. If they win, they get the gold shown on the card and the extra gold they rolled for.

A large chart labeled zero through 100 keeps track of everyone's numbers. You get two wooden counters in your color, one for tracking the combat and one for marking your extra gold. These tokens move up as you roll for each participant. After everyone has finished rolling dice, the diplomacy phase starts. Everyone who wants to play an Event Card (or bluff the others about it with some other card) holds it out now, and when revealed these cards may change the combat totals or switch who gets what gold. No matter whose turn it is, if getting the golden spoils of war takes you to 15 coins at the end of that turn, you win.

The whole game has a tight, compact, solid feel, though its small size makes it hard to put the lid back on once you've gotten the components out. The cards are the perfect stock and feel for shuffling and playing, and the gold coins -- while small and slippery to get hold of -- will withstand a lot. Wooden tokens always add a little class, though you have to apply your own stickers and you're paying for a set of five more dice. And of course, John Kovalic's artwork can't be beaten with a stick.

And neither can play. The rules are tight as well, and it's a simple but workable idea. Those who roll lower are going to get more gold than their opponents, but a handful of ones on the dice isn't going to win the day. Too many of the Event cards break the rules about scoring gold, though there are enough "Forget It!" cards to make them a problem all their own as they suck the potential fun out of an eleventh-hour upset.

Nevertheless, even with the small selection of cards there's plenty of pushing and shoving, and it seems like a great deal of thought went into the cards and balancing out their various abilities. There are holes in the rules in need of plugging, alas, but ***My Dwarves Fly*** is a small and powerful package, and it carries enough of a thinking man's punch to elevate the strategy as well.

--Andy Vetromile

Evil Stevie's Super-Secret Invitation

by Steve Jackson

One of the perks we like to offer to *Pyramid* subscribers is access to material of interest to gamers before the rest of the world knows about it. This article refers to one such limited-time event.

Unfortunately, because of the hard-coded preview sampler for *Pyramid* articles that non-subscribers can access, we find ourselves needing to pad out this invitation with some rambling opening paragraphs before getting to the exclusive-for-subscribers offer. Fortunately, two paragraphs ought to about do it.

Are you still with us? Have we weeded out the spies? Good.

As many of you know, Steve Jackson Games bought an online game named ***UltraCorps***. After a year of work, we're opening it again for free play. We have completely recoded the game (it's now in perl and runs on a Linux box).

Our first open session will *not* be announced in the Daily Illuminator -- but *Pyramid* subscribers can get in. Starting at midnight Saturday the 26th, and running for 48 hours, *Pyramid* subscribers can access the game at www.ultracorps.com. This session, which we're referring to as Hotel, will be for solo play only: you can read the rules and create solo games, ticking them at your own speed, to conquer small clusters of worlds.

Forum comments can go to <http://forums.sjgames.com/showthread.php?p=150547#post150547>

If Hotel goes well, it won't be long until we open a group alpha-test.

Monday we'll mail out a link to a short questionnaire. Please, please respond, and help us improve the game!

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Gratitude Adjustment

If one were to draw a spectrum, with one end labeled "gratitude is a function of complex life" and the other labeled "humans are the only beings capable of expressing gratitude," I'm not sure where on that spectrum I would fall. On the one hand, dogs seem awfully thankful for, well, just about everything, really. On the other hand, few other animals exhibit such tendencies, ranging from hamsterical indifference to the presumptuous expectations of felinity. ("Why aren't you petting me, human?")

Still, it's interesting to postulate, for a moment, that the capacity for thanksgiving is a purely human tendency. And with that capacity comes the possibility that an alien species wouldn't have the foggiest idea what "gratitude" -- or some other emotion -- was.

Aside: For the *Star Trek* campaign I ran many moons ago, I had pregenerated characters, and began each adventure with a script. One of the characters was a J'naii, an androgynous alien from a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode featuring genderless humanoids. This character in particular was the ship's counselor, and so I had one opening script that began (roughly):

Doctor (in Counseling Session): "Tell me about your . . . mother?"

Crewmate: "Why do you care about my mother?"

Doctor: "I don't, really. But the literature says you gendered beings place great significance on mothers, so I figured it would be a good opener."

I think there's great roleplaying potential for having alien species be devoid of certain emotions or tendencies. (For "alien," I'm referring to any non-human sentients -- elves, AIs, spirits, you name it.) If you were incapable of gratitude, how would that shape your outlook?

Some possibilities:

Indifferent. It's possible for a society not to be grateful because generous actions are viewed as the logical or natural thing to do. In the same way we don't tell someone, "Thanks for continuing to breathe" (nor do we feel any sense of being owed a thanks for breathing), it's possible such a species merely views generous acts as second nature.

Huffy. Consider a proud Klingon-like race. They may not only be unfamiliar with the concept of gratitude; they may feel the gestures associated with such acts to be an affront, akin to a challenge. "Why did you get the door for me? Do you think me too feeble to handle a brass knob?! NOW WE DUEL!!"

Conniving. A species might see generous gestures as a sign of weakness, and seek to take advantage. "Ahh, you've given me a gift? Interesting. Err . . . I could use another one of these. Preferably with a receipt."

And so on. Let your imagination run wild; how could a gesture be taken the wrong way? (Friend of a friend story, so take it with a grain of salt: A married American couple moved to Japan, and shortly thereafter one of that couple gave a coworker a small gift -- a usual enough gesture here in the States. The coworker invited the couple to his house, where the two married couples had dinner. During the course of this dinner, the American couple started talking about typical American stuff . . . things the Japanese couple were deeply uncomfortable talking about. Apparently, the American couple thought the dinner invitation was a gesture of friendliness, and was treating the couple as a friend or potential friend. The Japanese couple were treating it as a social formality; one gestures deserves reciprocity, and the dinner was not an attempt to further any bonds.)

Equally interesting as envisioning a lack of emotion from a species -- but much more difficult -- is to consider an emotion that an alien feels, but humans *don't*. Probably the easiest way to envision these are those emotions that are harder to pinpoint. Some examples are *schadenfreude* (taking pleasure in the troubles of others) and *esprit d'escalier* ("the wit of the staircase" -- thinking of the perfect retort *after* the fact). Some emotions are even relatively new, such as [nostalgia](#).

Picture what an alien species would be like if it had alien emotions, such as:

- The desire to eradicate a longing for childhood.
- The need to remain in a better position than one's children.
- The cyclical nature of wanting something and getting it, then not wanting it and discarding it.
- The hope for evolution in everyday activities.
- And so on.

Of course, some of these ideas can spring other ideas about the species or its development. For example, a species that exhibits universal reincarnating or mass-regenerating abilities might have an emotion of the selfish eagerness to become a martyr. (This might especially be true if there is some pleasure or bliss in the rebirthing process: "You say that jumping into the warp core is the only way to save the ship . . . but I'm thinking you've got martyrlust again.") Roleplaying such emotions would be challenging, and I don't recommend piling on the emotional differences for any but the most important, campaign-active species . . . but it's still fun nevertheless.

Emotions are complex, and -- in many ways -- ill-understood in humans. I suspect that alien life, if it does exist, will have some emotions in common with humanity that are advantageous to their continued life. But I also suspect that many of their emotions will be utterly unfamiliar to us, and our emotions to them. And I also suspect that many interesting tales will spring from our efforts to understand each other.

If nothing else, maybe these alien visitors can teach the concept of "gratitude" to our cats.

--*Steven Marsh*

A Mélange of Magical Creatures

for GURPS

by Eric Funk

Below are a few encounters with several wondrous creatures. All require mana to function properly.

Prairie Whale

These gentle giants are often seen in the plains, feeding on worms and other burrowing insects. Traveling underground, they are shy and tend to stay a cautious distance from sources of loud vibrations. They have a reputation for helping people who are caught in quicksand, mudslides, and shifting sand.

*The first military use of whales by a non-aquatic race must be relegated to Prince Milo of Felton. His country and one of its neighbors were both landlocked, and the Prince sought a covert way to break the stalemate that has kept armies stationed at each other's borders for as long as he could remember. In exchange for creating a large nature preserve, a group of druids agreed to procure for him a pair of prairie whales (on the condition that he value them over himself). With this in progress, he commissioned a special carriage to be pulled by the beasts. These mages were then given a charter to protect the land, and an astronomical budget to do so, **if** they could finish the chariot within the year. Needless to say, they succeeded, and the Prince was soon behind enemy lines sabotaging outposts and planting listening and homing devices for future missions (and teleporting agents). It is said that when he died, the whales pulled the chariot with his bones inside toward the sunset, never to be seen again.*

-- Gorsu the Sage, *Magical Monsters*, Chapter V

Appearance

Prairie whales resemble ordinary whales in shape and texture, but their skin is tougher and in earth tones. They generally resemble the strata in which they frequent. Their hide is tough and can turn away most weapons that can affect them (metal blades pass through harmlessly).

Uses

Prairie whales generally ignore small concentrations of humans, but a mutual protection pact could serve to employ them as shepherds or border scouts. Because they can ignore weather, they can make for excellent messengers, couriers, and wilderness agents. Some less respectful sophonts use the skins to make kayaks to paddle across the plains. Other uses include gloves that allow one to reach through metal and earth, enclose non-metal items, and pull them out. Some plains tribes believe these creatures to be the cause of earthquakes, and have developed various rituals involving whale-fat and oil by-products.

Prairie Whale (See also "Whale," p. BE37)

ST 40; **DX** 13; **IQ** 8; **HT** 14.

Will 10; **Per** 12; **Speed** 8; **Dodge** 11; **Move** 8 ("Water").

SM+4 (16 hexes); 6,000 lbs.

Traits: Breath Holding; Crushing Striker (Snout); DR 10; Enhanced Move 0.5 ("Water" Speed 12); Ichthyoid; Subsonic Hearing; Vibration Sense; Walk Through Earth; Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-12; Survival (Plains)-16.

Adventure Seed: Moby Dicks

The party is hired to find some prairie whales that have been reputedly knocking over carts and causing problems. If necessary, they are provided with a "speak with animals" item that will enable them to communicate with it. After a long trek, they finally catch up with the creatures, and after a chase and small fight discover that their baby has been captured by some surface creatures. They can no longer communicate with it. Part B involves piecing together the vague description of a humanoid from a whale's point of view, and then tracking them down. Part C will entail releasing the creature before it is killed or placed under mind control. Something that may set back the villain's plans is that the whales are intelligent enough that animal spells do not work on them -- they require Mind Control.

Blink Flowers

These seemingly ordinary perennials possess a bizarre power: for every hour of daylight, they suddenly displace themselves about one yard closer to the sun. The destination must be "safe," possessing at least adequate soil and sunlight. If no such place exists in that direction at this time, it will wait. The next hour it will try the safest spot in the direction of the sun within two yards, and so on, charging every day of its life. There has been no proven limit to the energy it can hold, other than its lifespan (10 years in captivity or about two in the wild). At river bends and edges of ravines, the flowers will congregate, unable to cross alone. They will then accumulate energy until one of the following happens:

- The flower has stored enough energy to cross it all at once.
- There are enough flowers that the sum of their energy is enough to make the same leap *together* and all arrive on the other side.

Tales of the origin of this plant vary, but the most easily believed is this: There was once a botanist, and the father of his lady love did not approve of him as a suitor. Using a variety of tricks, the botanist was able to sneak in small messages to her. In one communication, they seemed to have a mutual longing for him to be able to give her flowers. At that he vowed to do so, and wrote her that he "will send her flowers." At that, he created the Blink Flower and seeded them where they would grow and travel through her yard after crossing a moat, passing through a thick stone wall and fighting prevailing winds. Seeing commercial and military applications, her father reversed his decision and the house quickly rose in power.

-- Yorgu the Bard, "Tales by the Fireside"

"I Say, a Moving Grove!"

Each flower, on average eight times per year, will make a "misjump" and arrive at a random destination (0.5%, 18 on 3d, see Teleport, p. M147). This means that the very few will have a chance to distribute seeds in the general area they were born in, and then move on to make sure the species continues. There are approximately 1,600 hours of sunlight during the growing season in a Temperate zone. During this time, it will, on average, travel about a mile. Every fall (or every half year in tropical climates) they will use an hour's power to send their seed pod up to a mile *away* from the sun. This instinct assumes that if the mother plant was able to travel this route safely, the new plant will have a chance to grow. This process also can suffer from a "misjump." In any time that it rolls a 17, it instead shudders and drops a seedling (before moving, if applicable). This sprout It will stay rooted for several hundred hours of sunlight, and then start its own trek.

Uses

Clever travelers can use these plants to cross divides if they are patient or can encourage them to jump. If the plant is about to be actually injured, they can Blink away randomly (as per the spell, see p. M148) 1d times, even at night. One carrying a Blink Flower seed can be teleported with the flowers when they move. (This requires that one be in contact

with one flower per 50 lbs of weight*). If another being "frightens" a flower in such a situation, all the flowers will move with the "friend." Trained gardeners can carefully glean a flower in such a way as to not "scare" the plant. This results in the plant growing another bloom, but does not delay its travel plans. Other uses include consuming petals, which can grant one the ability to teleport short distances in combat (once per petal). Some warn that these petals are mildly hallucinogenic or addictive. Reputed uses include paper that will blink away from flame powered by the heat and arrows that will follow a target even if it blinks away.

*This assumes a standard SM-6 (7") flower. For each +/-1 to SM, divide or multiply this mass by 2.

Appearance

There are great varieties of colors and heights that Blink Flowers can express, and this leads some botanists to assign new names to them. They vary from small, clover-sized flowers in the frigid regions to sunflower-sized monsters in tropical areas.

Blink Flowers

ST 0; **DX** 0; **IQ** 0; **HT** 14.

Will 10; **Per** 12; **Speed** 0; **Dodge** 3; **Move** 0.

SM-8 to SM+3, typically SM-6 (3.5" to 9', average 0.2 yards); 6 ounces to 30 lbs.

Traits: Body of Wood (p. M 165); Hit Points (1 to 10); Hard to Kill 2; Vibration Sense; Wild Animal.

Skills: Body Sense-12.

Adventure Seed: "'Till Burnham wood doth come to Dunsinane"

The local ruling Lady doth not find amusing the appearance of a group of blink flowers in her garden. She is more frustrated that when her people try to cut them, they blink randomly about, even back into the garden! Somehow, the heroes must get rid of them; telling her that they will disappear on their own will not suffice.

Cloud Penguins

These cute, playful animals are fun to watch, yet can be a hazard to mountain climbers and an annoyance to dwellers in areas that are often foggy. They instinctively avoid fire as it disrupts cloud patterns, although they enjoy playing in the sun. Indeed, it is often safer than playing near the bottom of a cloud.

In some ways, these creatures are like dolphins, playing with items they find, and tossing them around between each other. They seem to like cloth, as it can float, rather than fall. Other play activities include trying to stand on a cliff side while others try to nudge one off or to take away a "toy." While fun to watch them perform, it is less so when it is with a mountain climber that they are trying to be playful. Then again, there are some experienced guides who claim to be able to understand their language. They say it makes them more aware of predators and hostile humanoids in the region.

-- The Scribe Kievi, upon return from the Dragon Mountains

Uses

Cloud Penguins can be trained to do tricks (such as anchoring ropes, fetching things, and giving distinct calls for different predators), but must be cared for carefully if taken into captivity. These avian-like creatures are communal and will pine away if they are not permitted a social group of at least four beings. Humans can sometimes serve, if they can play for at least an hour every day. A mage with any cloud or mist-making spell can easily keep a small flock

happy. Mist and storm-circled gloomy castles may have problems with these playful creatures -- if they can find something to eat.

Appearance

These small bird-like creatures possess white and blue plumage. The blue can vary from sky blue to navy.

Cloud Penguins (*see also Penguins, p. BE 25*)

ST 4; **DX** 10; **IQ** 4; **HT** 11.

Will 10; **Per** 12; **Speed** 5.25; **Dodge** 8; **Move** 6.

SM-4 (0.5 yards); 10-20 lbs.

Traits: Acute Vision 1; Domestic (or Wild) Animal; DR 1; Enhanced Move 0.5 (Air Speed 18); Fewer HP (-7); Flight (Winged; Clouds only; Air Move 12); Gregarious; Knack: Predict Weather; No Fine Manipulators; Sharp Beak.

Skills: Aerobatics-12; Brawling-12; Survival (Mountains)-14; Throwing-10.

Adventure Seed: The Sky's the Limit

The team has been asked to recover something in the mountains. (The quest may be to recover a relic in a lake, a dragon's egg, or to find a lost temple or airship.) The party has the directions, and their guide has a trio of cloud penguins that follow him around. In an attack by a wild animal, the guide is killed or incapacitated. Can the party cope with this? Can they learn to communicate with these wild creatures and achieve their goal?

River Rabbit

This elemental-kin is not actually a mammal, but shares many qualities with its namesake. They "burrow" in water, leaving "tunnels" that repel water from them for about 24 hours. They enjoy salt water and fresh water equally. They prefer water where sunlight penetrates, and like to be able to scamper to the bottom to graze. Fish instinctively avoid the air pockets, save for archerfish and jumping fish. Aquatic mammals (such as dolphins and beavers) take advantage of the air pockets when they can. Natural enemies include alligators, jumping fish, and sentient beings.

The tunnels can be collapsed using magical spells that destroy air or shape and purify water. Concussion or lightning spells can stun them relatively easily (along with everything else in the water). They are pests to amateur fishermen who dislike the chance that a lure might be hanging in mid-air, yet underwater. River rabbits like to nibble on the bottom of boats, and are blamed for when lines break or a plant-based lure is lost. The tunnels they leave can cause penalties to swimming and boating control rolls in the area. The base is -3, and for every factor of two, the penalty increases by 1, lessened by the SM of the boat or swimmer. E.g. One rabbit, SM+2 rowboat $1=2^0$, so $-3 + 0 + 2 = -1$. Sixteen river rabbits ($16=2^4$) versus a yacht (SM+4) means a penalty of $-3 - 4 + 4 = -3$

Ah, here comes the young Lady Penelope with her scintillating blue River Rabbit, "Undine." Isn't it cute with its golden collar? The real life-protecting collar is a plain one underneath, but I hear it is more expensive than the golden one above it. Well, at least it is more sociable than the chameleon cats that were the fad last year . . .

-- Memoirs of Lady Tara Windermere, "At the Royal Court"

Uses

The animals can be kept as pets in a pond, "cage" (tub), or moat. The tunnels can provide secret passages through moats or rivers, if one can either enlarge the rabbit or the tunnels, or shrink one's self. If nothing else, one can simply

use it like a long air tube, although the indigenous lagomorphs can get angry if one blocks a passage. Some covert ops units may carry river rabbits, releasing them and tossing treats further and further into the water to cause them to tunnel in a desired direction. This can be facilitated by using standard fishing gear (without hooks). If the tunnels could somehow be made permanent through alchemical or magical means, then assuredly people would want to make homes below the surface, from hideaways to pirate caches to palaces! If the "tubes" of water could be excavated intact, imagine the wondrous buildings one could build!

River Rabbits (see p. BE28)

ST 4; DX 14; IQ 3; HT 14.

Will 10; Per 12; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 7.

SM-5 (0.2 yards); 4-8 lbs.

Traits: Acute Hearing 2; Domestic (or Wild) Animal; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 14); Night Vision 3; Quadruped; Sharp Claws; Terrain Adaptation (Water Tunnels); Walk on Water (Accessibility: Under Water Only).

Skills: Brawling-12; Stealth-12; Survival (River)-14.

Adventure Seed: Underpass

A rail company is seeking to set up a regular passageway for travelers and instead of hiring an architect and an earth mage, they wish to establish an underwater passageway. Jobs for the adventurers include:

- Rounding up the river rabbits.
- Wrangling and training them.
- Protecting them from predators.
- Protecting the travelers.
- Discouraging competition and/or obtaining a Warrant from local officials to maintain a monopoly.

Storm Ants

These insects seem to have the ability to communally cast a spell of Rain. They then farm special kinds of molds that grow in the damp, dark conditions under the perpetual cloud. Able to walk on water, they are merely slowed by the presence of rivers. Natural enemies include insectivore amphibians such as toads, frogs, and lizards.

If someone can sense and express scents (through magic or other abilities), one can actually communicate with a colony. One can convey no more information than through simple gestures, and trust must be earned, but true communication is possible. (e.g. "I not food," "This not food," "Death that way.")

I hear these [ants] are popular with the wizards who want to help perpetuate the "land of eternal darkness" meme around their castle. [. . .] Rumors persist of a colony that can also call lightning to smite its foes.

-- Frim the Mad

Appearance

A variety of ordinary-looking insects, their special properties can be detected by looking at their aura or by analyzing the magic within them. Additionally, if they are part of the communal spell, it can be detected in operation.

Uses

Storm Ants have uses in potions and in items relating to their activities: water walking, cloud control, and mental

communication. Properly located, a colony can produce a perpetual supply of drinking and irrigation water! Some mages are trying to breed a variant that will cast a spell to bless crops.

Storm Ants (see p. BE43)

ST *; **DX** *; **IQ** *; **HT** *.

Will *; **Per** 12; **Speed** *; **Dodge** *; **Move** 2.

SM-10 (1.5"); neg. wt.

Traits: Domestic (or Wild) Animal; Magic Resistance (Improved); Quadruped; Racial Memory; Telecommunication (Telesend; Racial; Vague (Scent-based)); Walk on Liquid (Water).

See Swarm rules, pp. BE43, B461. A 1-hex swarm also collectively has Magic Resistance 10.

Adventure Seed: Rain, Rain Go Away

Locals have noticed that there is a rain cloud slowly moving toward the village. At the heart is a moving group of army ants! Can they be stopped? Can they even be diverted? If not, tasks involve evacuating the buildings that will be overrun, and shoring up the local streams and rivers. Finally, someone will have to protect the town from looters while the inhabitants are away.

Mining Birds

What began as a mutant strain of the common chicken has proven itself to be resilient (or so the popular legends tell us). They creatures are now a form of "para-chicken," no longer interfertile with other poultry. They generally get along with most barnyard animals, even if a few might not get along with them. They have no fear of fire, and sometimes walk through it! They like to make nests on top of smooth or indented sections of rock.

In addition to the regular grain and insect consumption of poultry, these also require exposed rock to peck. (This is a good way to get rid of rocks in the garden or field.) It is not recommended to store them in a castle, or they will eat you out of house and home. These birds are very territorial once they mature. This frustrates would-be thieves as they instinctively return to their nests every night. Their infant "down" is spongy, and their first feathers of adolescence are leathery (DR2). If their flight feathers are clipped at they come in, then they will not be able to learn to fly, and are unable to do so when they reach adulthood. This is fortunate, as their feathers get harder as they age!

The roosters are popular in medieval cock fights as the sounds apparently simulate what a sword fight sounds like, or so the observers say. I've never been to one myself, but a friend 'o a friend says that one trainer was mauled by his own beastie as he tried to show it off. It literally blinded 'im. I heard it took all his winnings from that match to pay for healers to fix it "no questions asked."

--Overheard in a Tavern

Uses

The egg shells and feathers are prized as materials for smithies and the meat for [iron rations](#). Before a hen gives up on an infertile egg, it will guard it fiercely. The feathers can take 50% off the material cost of a coat of scale mail and provide modest protection (an extra DR1 in addition to normal steel for that era), but not from warriors with dragon scale armor laughing at you (until *they* try to face an angry steel rooster that can jump face-high and peck with an armor-piercing beak). There are some lower-tech tribes that make armor completely from these feathers. Artists can feed chickens with special diets to get *any* color feathers. The same technique can be applied to eggs. In addition, some alchemists have had success hollowing out the eggs of iron-fed chickens and filling them with explosives . . .

The structure of the beasts' bodies is such that they are very resilient. This makes the bones very suitable for the framework of small aircraft, clockwork mechanisms, and support structure for alchemical fluid systems. Children also enjoy seeing how much force it takes to break a "wishbone." The dried meat is tasty, but tradition permits one only to eat one portion per month.

If raised and fed on only a particular mined ore, then the creatures' bones, feathers, and eggs will all contain a more refined version of the metal. There may indeed be hens that lay golden eggs locked away in the more secure part of a castle . . .

There are no great tales of loyalty for a chicken. This is still true of Steel Chickens. Instead, we have a military blunder to recount. It was late when the Dvanian 3rd Golem detachment occupied the enemy "village." They had a sentry, but he was just to give new orders to the stone golems. The sentry was called in by the commander who had located several kegs of beer, and was sharing them with the troops. When the officers awoke the next morning to find the golems' ankles were pecked away, some angry silvery chickens were guarding a nest on the back of one. Apparently they lost three men trying to beat the birds away.

-- Gorsu the Sage, *Magical Monsters*, Chapter VII

Rock Chicken (see p. BE40)

ST 6; **DX** 13; **IQ** 4; **HT** 12.

Will 10; **Per** 12; **Speed** 7 **Dodge** 10; **Move** 7.

SM-5 (0.2 yards); 13-20 lbs.

Traits: Chummy; Domestic (or Wild) Animal; DR 10; Fewer Fatigue Points (-6); Fewer Hit Points (-3); Flight (Winged; Air Move 6; Costs 1 FP *per second*); Night Vision 1; No Fine Manipulators; Sealed; Sharp Beak; Sharp Claws; Temperature Tolerance 2.

Skills: Brawling-12.

Technique: Hit Location (Brawling; Face).

Roosters may have Traits Berserk (12), Bloodlust (12), and increase ST to 9, and the Skill Brawling to 14.

Adventure Seed: Cash or Personal Chick

Someone who owes the party money comes up with a last-ditch effort: he gives them a "prize-winning" silvery chicken. The downside is that the rooster will take some time to warm up to any of the party. In the meantime, they will have to contend with the fact that, while the previous owner wasn't in the room, it wounded the familiar of a vindictive wizard, who will make trouble for the party . . .

Variants

To turn "Fantastic Monsters" into "Monsters from Space," simply replace magical origins with psionics and/or variant biology. For a steampunk/cliffhangers setting, they may all be the product of Mad Science! And, of course, in a horror campaign there may be something Evil about them . . .

Resources

Pyramid

- "[Antarctic Rim](#)" (Technomancer) by Loki Carbis
- "[Cetaceans in *GURPS Blue Planet*](#)" (Whale PC templates) by C.J. Beiting
- "[Honey, I Shrunk the PCs](#)" by SwiftOne
- "[Pet-Antics](#)"

Books

- "Being a Green Mother" by Piers Anthony has a whale that can fly in the sky.
- ***GURPS Bunnies and Burrows***
- "Pate de Fois Gras" by Isaac Asimov tells about goose that lays golden eggs.
- "Placet is a Crazy Place" by Frederic Brown has "birds" that fly through the earth as if it was thin air

Saroo

by Matt Riggsby

Somewhere in the tropical seas is Saroo, the fabled source of the world's finest ambergris. Though difficult to locate, even with good maps, you may eventually find it. From a distance, it appears to be a steep-sided island of moderate size, covered with deep green vegetation with a few rough, rocky outcroppings peeking through. A small town, which appears to be built on piers and pontoons, hugs the edge of the island, with a few small huts barely visible through the vegetation here and there on the island itself. As you approach it more closely, you may be surprised by a distinctive, although not necessarily unpleasant, musky odor. But you'll be more surprised when the island opens some of its eyes and looks back at you.

Geography and Land Use

Saroo is roughly oval, with surface area of about one and a half square miles. It is comprised of a single hill with a sharp central ridge reaching a height of up to 300 feet along the length of the oval. The terrain is relatively steep at the shoreline and along the ridge, but fairly level, if a bit bumpy, in most of the interior. The island is covered with a very dark, fertile soil which supports a wide range of extremely thick vegetation. Indeed, the vegetation grows all the way down to the shore with no sandy margin by the water.

The land appears to be completely uncultivated, with multiple layers of underbrush and jungle canopy. While it is true that the land is not tilled, a great many of the plants have some practical use and most of those are edible. It seems likely that generations of inhabitants have selectively removed less desirable plants, leaving only more useful ones behind. As a result, although the inhabitants make extensive use of the jungle and get a great deal of food from it, they are ultimately gatherers on the island, not agriculturalists. Nevertheless, they get the bulk of their food from fishing and supplement their fishing and gathering with several varieties of cultivated seaweed.

Only a fraction of the island's buildings are built on the island proper. Instead, the inhabitants maximize the amount of valuable jungle available by anchoring complexes of floating piers around the edges. They build homes and storehouses atop the piers and grids for the cultivation of seaweed underneath. The buildings on land are mostly temples, homes of the rich and, inland, shelters for the ambergris mines. The total population is about 25,000, and there appears to be room and resources enough for at least a few more.

The disconcerting thing about the island is that it moves. And rather than just drifting with the current, it moves under its own power. Saroo, or more properly *the* Saroo, is a vast living being of such tremendous age that it has accumulated layers of soil from blowing dust and organic debris (it is rumored that some trees grow as well as they do because their roots have penetrated Saroo's skin and draw nutrients from it). The Saroo follows a long annual migration through tropical seas, never coming too close to the mainland, although it passes well within sight of small islands.

History

It is believed that the first inhabitants of Saroo were simple islanders who lived by fishing and desultory cultivation. Conflicting legends cast those inhabitants variously as refugees from war, chosen people rescued by their god from a cataclysm, and simply fortunate wanderers who happened to find a convenient home. However they came there, they settled down quickly, feeling that a moving home was a small price to pay for plentiful fishing. Moreover, they found a number of goods for lucrative trade with more civilized nations, most notably ambergris deposits.

The original residents had no leaders as such, only "big men," notably persuasive and charismatic individuals who usually managed to get their way when group decisions needed to be made. The closest thing they had to authority was the shaman, who was charged with propitiating the many spirits controlling various aspects of the world and

interpreting omens. It's fairly clear that the shamans' first duty became maintaining relations with the Saroo, who had become by far the most important figure in an infinitely large pantheon. With an increasing focus on the Saroo as their primary divinity, it was inevitable that the shamans began to exert more influence over the day-to-day lives of the islanders. More and more, they came to direct the use of goods, public and private activities, and the organization of society in ways they believed would please the god on which their people lived, justifying it on the grounds of direct communication from the Saroo itself.

Although some residents may have grumbled under increasingly heavy yoke of religious domination, the shamans may very well have been onto something. The inhabitants of the Saroo certainly enjoy remarkable wealth, good health, and a pleasant climate. Moreover, the Saroo has never been occupied by a hostile power. Not for long, at any rate. A few centuries ago, the Saroo passed near the territory of an aggressive kingdom with a strong navy. An expedition of several ships was sent to seize the island to secure its resources, take the natives away to sell into slavery, and if at all possible learn how the Saroo might be guided or otherwise put to more practical use. Not being great warriors, the inhabitants were quickly overcome and many fled to hide in the jungle.

The shaman at the time, who had fallen captive, was told to order his people out of hiding or else serve as an example of what would happen to those who resisted the invaders. The shaman defied them, claiming that his god would protect him and anyone who shed his blood would be cursed. The invaders reacted predictably and set out to drag the hiding natives out of the jungle. Within the hour, the story goes, there was a great shaking, and the Saroo sank quickly under the water, drowning the invaders and dragging their ships down in the resulting whirlpools. The only survivors were a number of natives who had hidden in natural gaps under the Saroo's surface, which, to their surprise, sealed themselves up when the Saroo submerged. The event left the island partly defoliated and the few survivors gasping for air, but they were free of foreign domination.

But despite some evidence of divine favor, the shamans also showed an increasing tendency towards madness. A number of shamanistic rituals in regions the Saroo passes through, the likely home of the early inhabitants, involve self-induced trances and frenzies. It seems likely that the shamans' altered states of consciousness did, in fact, attune them to the Saroo's thoughts. However, those thoughts were sufficiently alien as to make the unprepared human recipients less and less sane. At the height of their political power, they became so unhinged as to be incapable of directing their society. The shamans became something like figureheads, with interaction with the people filtered through a small priestly bureaucracy. Their decrees still have the force of law, but their obscure meanings have become the subject of contentious interpretation.

The stage was set for the return of the big men. Behind the proclamations of the shamans, the big men remained important figures in society, helping to arrange marriages, mediate disputes, organize work parties, and so on. With the shamans unable to coherently order their people, the big men rose to prominence, and this time in a society with a more established sense of social order. Calling themselves "elders," (although there were no particular age requirements; many so-called elders continue to be as young as their late twenties), a number of prominent individuals slowly took over the day-to-day tasks of administering the island and, more importantly, making decisions about how to distribute the considerable income from the ambergris trade.

For the past two centuries or so, the elders have administered, if not ruled, their island in relative peace. It has not been completely without problems, of course. Harsh weather is an ongoing concern, and the town has had to withstand some particularly damaging typhoons. And despite the storied fate of the foreign invaders many centuries ago, the Saroo appears not to notice quick raids, even particularly violent ones. Pirate raids are a constant danger; two generations ago, a particularly vicious group managed to put large parts of the town to the torch, requiring the natives to cut a great many floating piers loose to save the remainder. More subtle influence is also a danger. Where force of arms will not succeed, more than one foreign power has attempted to buy rulership of the Saroo, either through fomenting civil unrest or directly influencing the elders.

A more severe threat to the elders has arisen in recent years. Though they have been gibbering recluses for centuries, the shamans may be returning to their senses. The past three shamans have had an unusual number of lucid moments, and they're starting to issue proclamations which the elders can't talk their way out of. And in recent years, the Saroo has been visiting cooler waters. There have been no huge changes yet, but there's an uneasy feeling on what is usually a

carefree island that what it's all leading up to won't be nearly as sunny as the past years.

The Saroo

Although the natives regard it as a living god and leave it at that, the nature of the Saroo is a matter of considerable debate for outsiders. Many question that it's a god, but its extreme resistance to magical scrying is undeniable. It is difficult to locate with information-gathering magic, and such spells are utterly incapable of penetrating its substance.

In some ways, the Saroo appears related to reptiles or fish. Beneath the soil, the Saroo's surface is a tough, rocky layer five to 10 feet thick, in interlocking scales 10 to 30 yards across. However, there are numerous pores and gaps between the plates, providing limited access to sub-skin layers. Those areas seem warmer than one would expect underground areas to be, making some suspect that the Saroo is warm-blooded.

These conjectures are not helped by a near total lack of information about the Saroo's anatomy. Patterns of current suggest that it has between 16 and 22 fins or flippers deep underwater with which it propels itself. It also has a barnacle-encrusted, flexible tail, about a mile long with a flattened paddle at the tip, which may play a role in steering. The tail is usually submerged, but it rises above the water every few months to slap the water a time or two, then sink again. It is not even known whether or not it has a mouth, although it is generally assumed that it consumes a great many fish from the shoals through which it swims.

There is also little indication what kind of sensory equipment the Saroo has. It is unknown if it is able to hear, smell, taste, sense heat and cold, the force of currents, or almost anything else. The only sense it does fairly clearly possess is vision. It has a number of knobby, domed outcroppings the size of large houses distributed around its perimeter, several yards above the shoreline. These are immense eyes, which open from time to time and look around. They don't seem to do so in response to any particular stimulus, but they do clearly track the movements of large or distinctive objects. Some believe that it has a telepathic link to the shaman, sensing what he senses, and perhaps even to everyone on the island.

The Saroo follows or perhaps even anticipates seasonal migrations of large shoals of fish, though some believe the scent of ambergris lures fish there. Either way, it seems as though the Saroo is always in excellent waters for fishing, much to the delight of its inhabitants.

Trade

The Saroo's greatest source of wealth by far is the ambergris mines. This tremendously valuable waxy substance is usually found, when it can be found at all, floating in the ocean or washed up on shores all over the world. Its ultimate origin, however, has been a mystery. The natives of the Saroo have found its source, or at least one source. Deposits of particularly fine ambergris have been found filling some of the Saroo's pores. The Sarooites, when they find these deposits, dig them up and trade them for a great deal of money.

The ambergris trade is supplemented by a small-scale trade in a variety of unusual spices available on the island, notably turmeric and ginger, and other natural substances used in medicines and alchemy. The island produces many fine woods as well, but most of it is used locally for homes and boats. These goods, though, are quickly and easily gathered. Most people are occupied in fishing and seaweed cultivation.

Sarooites also produce small quantities of intricately woven textiles decorated with maze-like geometric motifs. They produce similarly decorated wooden screens and panels which are used to define spaces in their homes. These are objects of considerable social regard, and craftsmen can spend months or even years on them off and on. They're rarely available for sale, but fetch high prices when they become available. Most, though, are exchanged as gifts (see Society and Government below).

In return for its valuable exports, Sarooites import cloth and raw fiber, precious metals (mostly in the form of jewelry), dyes and paint pigments, and a range of goods which require mineral resources and high heat to produce: metal,

ceramics, and glass. The island lacks ores, sand, and good clay, and lightweight wooden buildings on floating piers are not a great platform for forging metal or firing pottery.

Society and Government

Although the settlement on the Saroo is big enough that not everybody knows everybody else, most people at least know a close relative of anyone they're not personally acquainted with. That, the lack of ethnic and religious diversity, and the lack of long-term contact between Saroo and any other one larger society may have prevented its own society from becoming more stratified. There are no legally recognized classes, and while men and women are recognized as having separate roles, they receive approximately equivalent legal protection.

The town has no legislative body as such. Its laws, though unwritten, are enshrined in tradition. Those laws can only be modified by a shaman's declaration, and it has been generations since they've been sane enough to make one. The elders form not a government so much as an executive council which can only operate with continued popular support, which is not always forthcoming, and the Sarooites are entirely willing to ignore the elders if they feel that too much is being asked of them. The greatest power of the elders is in their capacity as managers of the ambergris trade. The elders decide who to trade with, negotiate prices, and determine how the income is spent. This power, though, is mostly external; the Sarooites need to be cajoled, not coerced. They look for a minimum of trouble, buying off powers they pass by or giving them favorable prices in exchange for protection from pirates and other diplomatic concessions. Policies of appeasement have served Saroo well, although the elders are certainly not above hiring one group of foreigners to fight another if it comes to that.

The ambergris income goes first to pay for stockpiles of necessities like drinking water, manufactured items, and diplomatic expenses. The income is also used to pay for what might be called capital spending. The floating platforms which make up most of the town may be built elsewhere and towed to the island, or more materials may need to be imported. But even after that, there's usually a sizable surplus left over. That surplus is distributed more or less evenly among the families of the island, making the Sarooites unusually affluent relative to the peoples they pass by.

Because of the steady influx of imported wealth and the relative ease of obtaining subsistence goods (the average Sarooite spends a mere four to six hours a day fishing, cultivating seaweed, or gathering vegetable produce), they have retained aspects of their ancestral gifting economy. They understand market economies, certainly; big men are quite adept at negotiating trades, and the average Sarooite is as good as any other city-dweller at bargaining. However, among themselves, the Sarooites exchange precious items as an indication of social regard. It is believed that notable early Sarooites exchanged elaborately decorated oars, jewelry, and spiritual fetishes with one another; big men became known as big men by negotiating the exchange of one particularly well-known or striking new object for another. The steady influx of outside wealth has increased the stakes: elaborately lacquered screens, corner posts for homes with carvings depicting mythic cycles, even gilded and jeweled doors are exchange for one another. The elders are the leaders in gifting cycles, trading the best-known objects, but just about everyone participates at some point in their life.

There are two ways to enter the cycle. One is to obtain a notable old object, usually as a gift from a parent or grandparent to a child. The other is to make such an object oneself. Either way, that provides a first bargaining chip and a way to get into trades with other people. Participants attempt to trade for other well-known or attractive objects, usually in ceremonies accompanied by feasting and pageantry, and usually with relatives and potential allies. Doing this, if properly done, enhances the reputations of both people and objects involved. Famous people make their items famous, and notable items are a point of pride and notoriety for their owners. The Sarooites are sufficiently sophisticated that they aren't impressed by money itself, as participants in gifting economies usually are, but they can sometimes be induced to trade one of their items for a particularly attractive foreign object.

Military and Law Enforcement

Saroo has no formal army and has never gone in for military aggression. People of appropriate age are expected to pitch in if the island is attacked, with elders serving as informal officers. Particularly fashionable young men style themselves "guardians" and swagger around the island wearing swords and armor. Their eagerness puts them in the

forefront of Saroo's defense when they are called on, but they have no official status. Typical armaments are short, broad, machete-like swords, short spears, light bows and large but lightweight shields.

Saroo likewise has little formal law enforcement. Smaller matters are settled through mediators, often elders. If criminals need to be apprehended, the act is carried out by the injured parties and their friends and relatives (and, at times, interested bystanders; it's considered good fun). Elders also act as judges in more serious matters such as large-scale theft, with material reparations being the most common punishment by far. Only in extreme cases, usually murder, are extreme penalties meted out. Exile is the most common punishment, but particularly unpleasant wrongdoers may find themselves becoming offerings to the Saroo.

Religion and Magic

The average Sarooite makes occasional prayers to minor spirits and burns incense and other symbolic offerings at a household shrine for personal favors: good health, luck at gambling, easy childbirth, and the like. Beyond that, however, religion is regarded as a matter for professionals. The shaman has received years of training in dealing with gods, so they let him do it.

Despite the growth of the Saroo settlement from a small village to a town of respectable size, there is still only one shaman at a time. It is his job to deal with gods in general and the Saroo in particular. Being a shaman is a lifetime job held for as long as the shaman is physically competent to perform his duties. These conditions are not mutually exclusive: if the shaman becomes physically disabled from age, illness, or accident, he is sacrificed to the Saroo. New shamans are chosen from a number of "apprentices" who learn from and, in these days of mad shamans, care for their superior. When an apprentice dies or is promoted, a boy is chosen to replace him, purportedly according to divine guidance.

Though probably initially quite peaceful, religion on the Saroo has become a bit bloodthirsty, with human sacrifice being a more-or-less annual occurrence. Victims, gaily decorated with flowers, fine clothes, and precious objects (as well as bound, drugged, or both), are taken in a grand procession to the front of the Saroo, brought to the top of a tall platform built for the purpose, and thrown into the water. They are believed to be swallowed by the Saroo to become favored servants. In living memory, victims have usually been criminals or attractive virgins, although there is historical precedent for others. Indeed, a number of stories about ancestral warrior-heroes end with the protagonist volunteering himself as a sacrifice to the Saroo.

Men do not use magic; what the shaman and his apprentices do is regarded more as a social interaction than direct manipulation of power. Magic is the province of women, who as girls learn charms and curses along with cooking and sewing. It's questionable how effective most of them are as spell-casters, but old women are respected and feared. Sarooites are as baffled by male spell-casters from abroad as they would be by men who said they wanted to have babies.

Architecture

The floating platforms on which the town proper is based are connected with thick ropes and rope bridges, allowing them to shed runoff into the water and move semi-independently in rough seas, although occasional severe storms can cause considerable damage. However, the shamans and wise women of the town seem to be able to protect it from harsh weather most of the time. Most platforms are only big enough for one home, although several may be roped together to provide a sort of plaza.

The typical Sarooite home is a long building with a single undivided room, doors in front and back, and a high gabled roof. The floor of the house is usually raised a foot or two above the platform on which it is built. The front has a set of broad steps, sheltered by the roof extending some distance beyond the house itself. The steps are often used for socializing and entertaining guests. The house has no permanent walls inside, but spaces are divided up by lavishly decorated folding screens. The household shrine is behind the house, again sheltered by an overhanging roof, as is a small paved area used as a hearth for cooking.

The few homes on the island itself are roughly similar in overall shape, but have a different arrangement. They are generally drawn together in compounds, with one particularly large house and a few smaller buildings, usually connected by a wooden fence, facing a courtyard. These homes are occupied by elders and their extended families. The out-buildings are used as housing for notable visitors and storehouses for imported goods and items for export.

The one stone structure on the island, sitting about twenty yards inland at the center of the starboard side of the island, is the shaman's temple, with materials imported at immense expense over the course of a century. Resting on a large stone platform, the temple is a roughly square building with a pyramidal roof and a pagoda-like spire rising above it. It provides housing for the shaman and several apprentices, storerooms for votive offerings, a few sturdy cells for prospective sacrificial victims, and both indoor and outdoor spaces for ceremonies. It is rumored that there's a hidden door in the temple leading *into* the Saroo.

Everyday Life

Diets at Saroo consist largely of fish, which have always been plentiful. The fish are accompanied by cultivated seaweeds and a variety of semi-wild foods growing on the island itself, mostly fruit and edible roots, fungi and leaves. Wild birds shot or trapped in the jungle are a traditional delicacy, although poultry imported from elsewhere has made it more accessible to the less wealthy. Grain is not cultivated at Saroo.

Probably the only major factor preventing the Saroo town from growing any larger is a lack of water. As it is, the natives drink relatively small quantities of pure water, mostly collected from run-off from the central ridge which collects into well-like pores. Instead, they get liquid from fruit juices, water-rich tubers, and a water-filled gourd which grows in clusters on tall trees, vaguely resembling a cocoanut palm. They also import casks of water when the opportunity arises.

Native costume for both sexes at Saroo consists of baggy shorts or short skirts and open vests or short-sleeved shirts, or occasionally belted sarongs for women, often in brightly dyed or embroidered fabrics. However, most people are happy to wear colorful clothing of any kind, and the island's extensive trade allows them to indulge their tastes: silk robes, broad-brimmed hats, colorful sashes, and other foreign garments are common. Nevertheless, as befits the climate, clothing is a matter of display, not protection from the elements, and bodily modesty does not rank high among the virtues of the Sarooites. People hard at work often wear simply a loincloth, and not even that when swimming in the sea, a popular recreation.

Sarooites are also very fond of jewelry, which is often worn even when clothes are not. Rings and necklaces are common, and most wear at least one earring or nose ring. Every Sarooite receives a tattoo emblematic of their family on reaching the age of majority. Shamans and their apprentices are subject to ritual scarification.

Loaded with wealth and possessing a culture which features giving things away as a means of increasing one's own status, Saroo isn't a bad place for small groups of short-term visitors. A flotilla will be politely invited to travel on to its next destination, but interesting-looking foreigners are likely to be afforded reasonable hospitality. Visitors require the permission of an elder to stay in town or on the island, but that's easy to obtain if the foreigners don't look immediately threatening. There are no inns or public houses, but they may be taken in by a family with spare room or given the use of a vacant house. Still, the Sarooites have a sense of proportion, and unless there's good reason for visitors to stay on (for example, ongoing negotiation with the elders), quiet hints to move on will start to arise after several days.

Saroo in the Campaign

As presented here, Saroo makes a possibly lucrative, if occasionally frustrating to locate, destination for trade and a pleasant port of call for characters on their way somewhere else. On one hand, it's a very comfortable place to spend a few days and the natives are fairly friendly. On the other, the Sarooites have a well-developed sense of identity, and people from the outside will always be foreigners. Moreover, while the Sarooites are interested in trade, there's a lot of

competition. The elders have a seller's market for their ambergris and many of their other goods, and outsiders will find themselves in fierce competition for the goods.

PCs inclined to pursue occult research could find endless mysteries to unravel on and in the Saroo. What is the nature of the Saroo: huge dumb beast, alien intelligence, or god? Have the shamans been in communion with another mind, or are their brains simply incapable of withstanding the Saroo's psychic emanations? Is there a passage into the Saroo under the temple (or elsewhere on the island), and if so, what is inside it?

Saroo is also an interesting target for pirates and thieves. It is, obviously, wealthy and not terribly well defended. However, even if you ignore the possibility of a curse by the living god Saroo (such things are rumored, although not well documented), Sarooites are very capable of buying powerful friends. Anyone who raids the island runs the risk of gaining naval powers as enemies.

For the same reasons, Saroo could be a destabilizing factor in international diplomacy. Consider this scenario: a kingdom in financial difficulty gears up to sack Saroo. Saroo, in turn, hires ships from a neighboring kingdom's fleet. The affair could quickly spiral into full-blown war. It could even happen without the Sarooites being directly involved, with different nations maneuvering for a superior position and undercutting one another's moves against the town.

Although Saroo has long been peaceful, recent events could destabilize it. The elders have contrived to keep Saroo society comfortable, well-fed, and too preoccupied with trading famous trinkets to have greater ambitions or broader worries. The return of the shamans could change that. What if the current shaman's madness cleared and he began to issue clear proclamations that the Saroo wanted no more contact with foreigners? Or outlined a plan to manipulate outsiders to destroy one another? At the very least, it would set off ripples of fear and resentment, and it could easily lead to a violent rift in Saroo's society. Likewise, if the island's migrations into increasingly cool waters also take it away from its traditional fishing waters and the tropical climate in which its plants thrive, the town of Saroo will find itself suddenly much more dependent on outside supplies.

Finally, Saroo could become a threat. Gripped by religious fervor, the Sarooites could become fanatical pirates, raiding and destroying ocean-going shipping. The Saroo itself would be more than a base. It would be the most dangerous pirate ship ever known, ramming not just enemy vessels, but entire fleets, and slapping others underwater with its vast tail. That Saroo itself could be a Great Old One, currently only sleeping, but when awoken will drive all of its inhabitants mad and compel them to violence. Perhaps the only way to stop it would be for a brave band of characters to infiltrate the island and find their way inside to find the hidden source of the Saroo's life-force. But beware of the ranks of now-immortal ancient warriors guarding the interior.

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Pyramid Review

Necessary Evil (for the *Savage Worlds Roleplaying Game*)

Published by [Great White Games](#)

Written by Clint Black & Scott Pyle with Randy Mosiondz, Shane Lacy Hensley, Zeke Sparkes, & Chris Toh

Cover by Zeke Sparkes

Illustrated by Storn, Cheyenne, Gil Formosa, & Talisman Studios

144-page full-color hardcover; \$29.99

Come the alien invasion, all good superheroes will step forward and do their very best to thwart the threat. Yet, what happens when these potential saviors of mankind fail? Not only fail, but die in the process? Who then will save us? Fortunately, there still exist plenty of super-powered individuals left on Earth . . . only, they never put their abilities to good use. Can the planets supervillains do what the heroes could not and save us?

This is the set up for ***Necessary Evil***, a Plot Point Campaign for the Origins-Award-winning [Savage Worlds Roleplaying Game](#). After having done dark fantasy in [Evernight](#), nautical fantasy in [50 Fathoms](#), and dark horror in the Vietnam War set ***Tour of Darkness***, this supplement is the first to address the subject and genre of superheroes for the system.

On January 1st, 2001, the first ships appeared over every city on Earth and then attacked. The crocodilian and shark-like Ktharens (or Fins, as they came to be known) possessed advanced technology and the ruthlessness to use it. Then another race -- the Vsori -- appeared, coming to Earth to search for their long-lost allies of Atlantis and offering us aid. The Vsori defeated the Ktharens and drove them into deep space, so when it came to celebrate, the Vsori were welcomed with open arms. And at that moment the Vsori struck, cutting down both the world's remaining superheroes and its surviving leaders with mammoth death rays. With this stroke Earth was under the heel of the Vsori Empire. Their aid had all been a sham; the Ktharens were servants of the Vsori anyway.

Now three years later, the Earth remains under alien rule. Surviving superheroes and villains have gone underground, some even joining resistance movements, of which Omega, led by the infamous Dr. Destruction, is the most well known. It is thought to operate out of Star City, the quite-literally star-shaped city that sits not far off the coast of the USAs Eastern seaboard. Created by the Outsider in 1955, the city is home to some amazingly futuristic technology and is one of the few cities not to have been pounded into rubble.

So if that is the set-up, how does ***Necessary Evil*** -- and thus the ***Savage Worlds Roleplaying Game*** -- do superheroes? Characters are created as normal, with players purchasing attributes, skills, Edges, and Hindrances; one Edge needs to be Arcane Background (Super Powers), although the GM can grant it for free if he wishes. This Edge automatically grants the character 10 Power Points to be spent on super powers, the list of which contains all of the usual abilities. Each entry has a point cost, suggestions for possible trappings, and modifiers that enhance its use. Thus for the Force Control power, the trappings suggested include colored energy, force fields, and tangible illusions; and modifiers that enable the wielder to bind opponents, to fly, create force fields, and even make multiple attacks.

Powers can be improved and new ones bought when a character rises in Rank and selects as his new Edge, the Power Points Edge. Granting only a few more Power Points, it is generally cheaper to improve powers rather than buy new

ones, which is also in keeping with the genre. At game start, a player can also take a Hindrance to gain his character more Power Points, which grants him greater flexibility in buying his characters super powers. This is almost a necessity, as 10 Power Points are not quite enough to design the character a player wants. All this is evidenced in the eight sample characters given a page each, which take the stead of an example of character generation. They include a Blaster, a Brick, a Scrapper, a Sorcerer, a Speedster, and so on. Super sorcery is interesting in that it grants a pool of points with which a character can temporarily buy and use *other* super powers as spells. In general, the powers reflect a low-scale Four Color genre, with player characters not being on the scale of heroes and villains found in the comics, although the rules do allow a player to create characters with similar abilities and powers.

Other Hindrances reflect the genre, such as Heartless and Gloater. There is little done to change the rules to fit the Four Color genre, the most notable being the Recurring Role rule, under which a character cannot *normally* die. Instead he is merely incapacitated for a week. This does not make death impossible, but rather that it should be dramatically appropriate. The campaign itself is supported with lists of weaponry, vehicles, and gear galore for both humanity and the aliens, while two whole chapters are devoted to the aliens and the secrets of Star City respectively. The latter includes a map of Star City, which is somewhat bland and lacking in detail.

The campaign itself consists of 30 individual scenarios, or Savage Tales, a third of which are key in advancing ***Necessary Evil's*** plot.

It begins *The Usual Suspects* style, with the player characters incarcerated by the aliens, but with a bang and a blast, Dr. Destruction comes to their rescue. Then he makes an offer they cannot refuse -- join Omega or die. Should they accept, the villains become a new resistance cell and are assigned various missions -- raids, acts of sabotage, searches for ancient technology, rescuing important people, and so on. The key missions all have a Rank minimum that the player characters must match. To attain these Ranks, they will have to play through the other Savage Tales, either randomly chosen, or selected by the GM. All 30 are arranged in a set of tables to this end, and will see the resistance cell traveling the world, and even visiting old Atlantis on the ocean floor and low earth orbit to fight the invaders.

Overall, this is a good campaign that can be played as is -- a one-shot affair, or added to an existing campaign, taking it in a new direction. Alternatively, it can be used as a what-if campaign, exploring a future not taken. Either option begins with the player characters falling to the Vsori, and having the villains they once faced from week to week fight back; or one that takes place in another timeline where the player heroes are actually the villains.

So far this is all well and good, because ***Necessary Evil*** possesses one big, fat omission. One that goes right back to the campaign's basic concept, that of evil being used to fight a greater threat. Considering how fundamental this is to the campaign, how much advice does ***Necessary Evil*** give on this aspect?

Almost none at all.

And that amounts to less than a quarter-page box of text labeled, "Evil, Not Psychotic." The advice can be summed up with, "Yes, yes, you are playing ambitious, murderous, megalomaniac bad guys bent on world domination or amassing a fortune, but please don't play mindless killers; and do find a means for your character to cooperate with others, or the campaign won't work." Which is good enough, but takes up less than a fifth of a percent of the book.

It is not enough.

Where is the advice on creating a super-villain player character? Where is the advice on playing a super-villain player character? Where is the advice on running a super villain player group? Where is the advice on running a super-villain campaign?

Simply put, not here.

Which leaves the reader to wonder what the point of ***Necessary Evil*** actually is. Because if it does not address its major selling point, what you are left with is the rules for creating superheroes under the ***Savage Worlds*** mechanics, plus a campaign to go with it. Both of which are decent enough. Yet it cannot escape the authors' failure to address the supplement's core concept; as a result, ***Necessary Evil*** fails to come across as *evil-lite*. It doesn't even reach such

dizzying heights; because of it, ***Necessary Evil*** manages to give short shrift to its key gimmick, and should be submitted to the authorities for not being as advertised.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Edward Abbot Abbot's Flatland (Inflated) RPG

Published by [Red Anvil Press](#)

Written by T. Craig Drake

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Art by Jeanette Naomi Ricks

33-page PDF; \$3.55

If you've spent any amount of time in college, you've probably been exposed to all manner of cult phenomena. Admittedly Tolkien tops the list of genre faves, but for those who really want to show off their esoteric tastes, Edward Abbott's *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* has the inside track. Putting both resources into roleplaying format may level the playing field a bit, but **Edward Abbot Abbot's Flatland (Inflated) RPG** isn't such an obvious choice for tabletop fodder.

Backing up for a moment: The original *Flatland* is the story of a world that exists in two dimensions: height and width. A. Square relates what it's like to live in a place where your geometry determines your social standing, females are at the bottom of the totem pole, and talk of dimensions beyond the first two is akin to heresy (the existence of Lineland and Pointland is accepted fact). It's a satire that takes aim at the social mores of its Victorian contemporaries.

As for the roleplaying game: This is less a setting and more a general suggestion. It cleaves to its source material, right down to the politically incorrect views of women and triangles. Players take the roles of geometric shapes, usually fighting against the established pecking order. Ever-vigilant Priests will attempt to thwart any threat you pose, though this version of the world has an expanded list of threats. A chapter called "Things to Kill" details some of the book's forces while adding a few of its own. There are some clever bits here; the creatures and forces are spoken of in varying degrees of obliqueness, and trying to figure out the references is half the fun.

Flatland (Inflated) utilizes what they call the KaSE system; what that actually stands for doesn't appear to be spelled out in the product. A character is the amalgamation of five general attributes that rate everything from your physical and mental states to your social and emotional conditions on a scale of one to four. You then have a series of Enhancers (though this covers positive and negative aspects) that cover skills and other specific facets of your persona. This may determine how sharp your angles are, your physical resistance (making this perhaps the only game wherein you'd like your character to be "thick"), and your social standing as the game begins (you may be a malcontent or "reformed" criminal). You start with a pool of points for getting attributes, and these determine what Enhancers you take. Low attribute scores force at least one Flaw on you, higher numbers give you Traits (positive factors), and upper levels require a mix of both.

Rolls use a d20. Once modifiers are totaled for an action and added to your base attribute, the result is multiplied by that attribute and added to the roll of the die. If you had Mental 1 and a modifier of +2, for example, that totals three and is multiplied by the original 1 before the die roll is figured in. The higher total wins.

The campaign type determines how these results actually affect the game. "Harsh and Brutal" means the difference between two rolls is applied as a penalty to future actions (you beat your opponent by four, so he's at -4 from then on). A "By the Numbers" campaign uses a mathematical formula that doesn't bear getting into here. It is the only play style

that uses actual Skills, though these are pretty funky too (the example given is a skill that depends on the facing of combatants in a fight).

With the exception of the cover, there's really no art to speak of . . . though it is at least as good as any other means of illustrating so remote and elusive a concept employed since the story's release in 1884. What you're left with is the functional and workmanlike layout of the no-frills text. The work is in serious need of additional editing, to clean up both the specific language and the outstanding grammatical issues (you'd think consistently capitalizing Flatland would be the place to start). Some rules need work, too -- it's clear some stats in character creation are meant to build on other stats, but not all of them list their prerequisites.

Edward Abbot Abbot's Flatland (Inflated) RPG is a clever idea, but like its inhabitants, it is intelligent but flawed. It's hard to be sure when it's being deliberately coy and droll and when the writing skills simply come up short. Though it's clear they know the material and have something to say, sometimes it gets away from them. Enhancers seem to bleed into one another, ultimately offering bonuses to certain rolls but little in the way of elevating the roleplaying side of things. The canned setting (the City of Concentric Enlightenment) reflects the source material's stifling atmosphere and political intrigues, but really amounts to "here's where the snooty-nosed people in charge live; go hoist them by their 2-D petards." It seems to lack the focus and feel needed to make it really come alive for or involve the reader. You just don't know what to *do* with it, and the truth is once you've gotten over the initial shock and amusement of seeing that someone has made a game from this, the best part is really over.

The game acknowledges its own limitations, and harbors no illusions about the permanence of such an endeavor. It's a night's diversion from the usual for most, or perhaps a scenic vista for a larger campaign (the Spacelanders have to come from somewhere, after all). Like **Pantheon**, **Paranoia**, and other games that break molds or skirt the edges of roleplaying convention with brief forays into the bizarre -- or like the story upon which it's based -- it's highly experimental stuff that will meet with raised eyebrows even from those who find its quirky tack an insightful way to open up new roleplaying avenues.

--Andy Vetromile

The Hunt for Murphy's Rules

Just yesterday I finished up editing quite possibly the biggest project I've undertaken. Sadly, being one of the confidential projects I tend to get involved in, telling you about it would mean I'd need to kill you . . . and *Pyramid's* travel budget would mean that I can only afford to hunt you down if you were in my kitchen.

Anyway, one of the aspects of this book that I find most interesting is trying to chew over each rule mentally, making sure they pass some kind of mental muster. Now, I have an interesting outlook on this process. Thanks to my half-decade at *Pyramid*, I'm constantly staring at each and every rule I encounter, with one thought in mind: "Could this somehow be turned into a Murphy's Rule?"

I feel fortunate to have had some of my Murphy's Rules submissions accepted. (In fact, one of my earliest involvements with *Pyramid* was defending and re-explaining my first [Murphy's submission](#), just a few months before I became editor.) But, as I've chugged through the editorial process last week, I couldn't help but wonder about our approach to rules.

Many times, I've seen folks on message boards (*Pyramid's* and others) treat any kind of incorrect Murphy-worthy rule as being a bad thing . . . as if the game designers, by not weeding out these offensive rules before publication, had violated some kind of social contract (like how I leave spoiler messages on people's answering machines: "Sorry you weren't able to go to the theater with us, but I don't think you would've liked the bit where it turns out that Harry Potter was Kaiser Soze, anyway . . .").

One rule I found last night -- and I don't think I'm revealing anything, since lots of games do this (including my oft-worked [D6 System](#)) -- has to do with opposed roles. Basically, in games where it pays to roll high, the result of that roll is sometimes used as the basis for the opposing roll. In other words, if making a forgery of a kid's crayon drawing needs a roll of 5, and a forgery of a DaVinci needs a roll of 30, then on a successful roll a person trying to detect a forgery might need to get higher than the original total of the forger. This leads to a curious result that, on a successful result, it's more difficult to detect a forgery the more difficult it was to make the forgery in the first place.

Now, I went back and forth a bit with my Hidden Master about this rule, and I came to the conclusion that -- although somewhat illogical -- it's not necessarily *wrong*. After all, I concluded, the person who needed the 30 in our hypothetical example above still needed to roll a phenomenal result; it seems awfully nitpicky to say that *if* the original task had been easier and *if* the person succeeds in the more difficult task and *if* you compare the situation with another one . . . Perhaps it's illogical to compare two different situations, if what the roll is ultimately measuring is different. It's like the old joke: "I went to Vegas in a \$10,000 car and went home on a \$100,000 bus"; the dollar amounts compared look the same, but they're not. Maybe whatever skill level it takes to roll that 30 is enough to provide the extra effort to make it more difficult to detect the forgery. Sure, it's a stretch, but not a huge one.

However, I suspect it ultimately comes down to something we believe about our RPGs . . . something that, all told, is quite possibly one of The Big Lies. Namely, that every system or design implementation exists for a reason; every contingency has been carefully considered; that extensive around-the-clock playtests would ferret out any erroneous or problematic rules. Of course, this isn't the case. Heck, it's hard to playtest a board game, and it might only have a dozen pages of rules at most. Now, multiply that by the hundreds or even thousands of pages of rules that a typical RPG system has, and the open-endedness of a typical roleplaying campaign, and it's all but inevitable for some oddball situations to crop up.

Of course, that doesn't stop us from trying to hunt those errant rules down. But, if nothing else, I try to have a little more sympathy when I find 'em. And maybe -- just maybe -- I can squint and come up with a reason for them to be there. If nothing else, looking at how rules might be correct is a nice change of pace from scrutinizing them for how they might be wrong.

--Steven Marsh

The King Of The Cats Is Dead

"I prayed to the darkness, to the night, to the carrion kind. I prayed to the king of the cats, the kind's emissary on Earth, he who walks amongst us and we do not know him. I prayed and I dreamed."

-- the visionary cat, in "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" by Neil Gaiman (*Sandman* #18)

I should warn you that this particular Transmission is still Suppressed. I can't make hide or hair out of it, despite it featuring plenty of both. It's got an ending, but one that comes way too early to resolve anything. I have only fragments, sentences pronounced in oracular fashion, words of power that I can't read. Perhaps none of us can, as our eyes can't take enough of it in. Perhaps you'll figure something out, or it will jump out at you when you hear it. Either way, though, to begin with, I need to tell you the creepiest story I ever read.

"That story had made him shiver and wonder, and ponder for days; not the story that had been told, but the secret story that had not been told: the story about the cats, the secret story that had been going on all along and that no one knew but they."

-- John Crowley, *Aegypt*

A crofter returned home late on a dark and stormy night to find his wife and cat waiting up for him by the fire. He burst in the door and started his breathless tale: "Wife, you will not believe what I saw out on the crossroad tonight." "What? What did you see?" the good woman asked, as the cat looked on politely. "Why, I saw eight black cats walking, each with white patches on their breast, just like old Tom here." "Oh, never mind old Tom, husband, what happened then?"

"What's more, they walked slow and in step, and between them they carried a coal-black coffin with a little crown on it, and every time they took a step, they said 'Miao!'" "Miao!," said the cat by the fire, and the crofter said, "Yes, just like that, Tom." "Oh, never mind old Tom, husband, what happened then?"

"Well, the lead cat stops and sees me watching, and he looks at me with his yellow eyes all unblinking. Just like old Tom is now!" "Oh, never mind old Tom, husband, what happened then?"

"The lead cat stares at me and he speaks! He says, 'Tell Tom Tim that old Tim Tom is dead.'" And what the wife was going to say to that we shall never know, because the cat by the fire leaped to his feet and shouted, "Old Tim Tom is dead? Then I, Tom Tim, am King of the Cats!" And with that, the cat jumped up the chimney in a shower of sparks and never was seen again.

"I will conclude my 'modern instances,' with a story told by M.G. Lewis, not probably so authentic as these, but perhaps more amusing. I relate it as nearly as possible in his own words."

-- Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, "On Ghosts" (1824)

I read that story at an obviously impressionable age, in an eerie illustrated version ostensibly for children. The version I read (which I've slightly abridged here) was almost certainly based on "The King o' the Cats," as conflated by the folklorist Joseph Jacobs in 1894 from five or six versions gathered from northern England in the immediately previous decades. In Jacobs' version, the King of the Cats is "Tom Tildrum," and other versions give "Dildrum" or "Tom" or "Peter." Mary Shelley gives the earliest version I've been able to trace in print, which she delightfully ascribes to her fellow horrorist 'Monk' Lewis. In Lewis' version, the King of the Cats is never named, and the listening cat recognizes the funeral from the witness' description and comes to the proper conclusion.

Folklorists (or at least those who use Stith Thompson's delightful index) call this story Type 113A, "Death of an elf (or cat)," noting parallels to other tales. In German stories collected in the early 19th century, a peasant receives a strange instruction to "tell Habel that Hubel is dead" or "tell Torke his child is dead" or just "say that Prilling and Pralling is dead." Upon relating the tale to his wife, a house-elf appears and runs off, or a mysterious crash sounds from another room where housework is suddenly interrupted by the departure of the elf. A Danish story disguises the elf (in this case a troll) as a cat ("Knurremurre is dead? Then I may return home!"), much like a Durham version ("Tell Madam

Momfort that Mally Dixon's dead") disguises a fairy as a cat. A version from the Tyrol goes the other way around; when the farmer repeats "tell Stutzkatze (Clipped Cat) that Hochrinde is dead" his serving girl runs off. And the Irish, bless them, have a deeply creepy version in which a man is killing a cat, who says to him, "Go home then, and boast that you have killed the King of the Cats." When he tells the story at home, his own cat leaps up and kills him in turn.

"By the magic powers they possessed it was made known to all the cats in the country that their King was being pursued by the hounds. Then on every hearthstone a cat howled. Cats sprang to the doors, overturning cradles upon children. They stood upon the thresholds and they all made the same curse -- 'That ye may break your backs, that ye may break your backs before ye catch the King of the Cats.'"

-- Padraic Colum, *The King of Ireland's Son*

There are other Irish stories, slightly less disturbing ones, about the King of the Cats. (This Hibernian context is probably the best place to mention that William Butler Yeats, upon hearing of [Swinburne's](#) death in 1909, responded "Now I am King of the Cats.") In Padraic Colum's version of the folktale "The King of Ireland's Son" (perhaps more familiar as Hans Christian Andersen's "The Traveling Companion") there is a lengthy digression in which the King of the Cats decides to hunt down the Eagle-Emperor, the [King of the Birds](#), and have a showdown between their two courts. Sadly, the two kings are turned to stone and their contest (and thus, that between cats and birds) continues to this day. Still another Irish legend concerns Irusan, the coal-black, bull-sized King of the Cats, who dwelt in a cave at Knowth. The bard Seanchan Torpeist, angered that mice had devoured his dinner at the royal hall of Guaire, pronounced a satire against Irusan, who, as King of the Cats, should have killed all the mice already. Irusan did not react well to this lese-majeste, and smashed into Guaire's hall, where he snatched Seanchan up in his mouth. But on his way back to Knowth, Irusan and Seanchan met up with St. Kieran at his forge. The saint, morally opposed to giant cats, even royal ones, dining on Christians, threw a hot iron bar through Irusan and killed him.

*"Last evening-tide
Brian an augury hath tried,
Of that kind which must not be
Unless in dread extremity,
The Taghairm called."*

-- Sir Walter Scott, *Lady of the Lake*, IV:4

The Scots also have a monstrous coal-black cat, named Big Ears, who appears in response to the Taghairm, a truly revolting ceremony, also involving a hot iron bar. For the Taghairm, the sorcerer turns a cat (or four, or seven) on a spit over the fire, loudly proclaiming "I roast this cat until his Friend answers a question." The yowls of the roasting cat both frighten malign spirits and summon Big Ears, who then grants the sorcerer a wish (usually second sight) or the answer to a question. (There is a slightly less revolting version, in which the petitioner is merely sewn up in an oxhide and left by a waterfall to listen to the spirits all night.) Scots historians soberly (well, that may be the wrong adverb) insist that the luck of the Camerons was due to a Taghairm carried out in the 17th century, and the last attested Taghairm occurred around 1650 on the island of Mull, performed by one Allen Maclean.

By the sort of odd coincidence that is never coincidence, it was in 1648 that King Louis XIV, "crowned with a wreath of roses," lit the official Midsummer fire on the Place de Greve in Paris, which was by time-honored French custom topped off with a basket of live cats. One would really like to follow that ghastly story up with an anecdote about Louis XIV's immediate death, but he was the longest-lived and most glorious of the French monarchs. At Metz, Aix-en-Provence, Gap, and other French cities, similarly horrid customs obtained until the 1760s -- at which time, of course, the French monarchy began immediately to hit the skids. Our man Frazer notes sacrificed "Corn Cats" at harvest time in Amiens, and symbolic feline corn-kings at Vesoul and Briancon, and similar shenanigans elsewhere in Burgundy, the Franche-Comte, and the Dauphine. Were the French kings placating -- or deterring -- the King of the Cats with their own rituals on St. John's Eve? Did the notoriously ailurophilic Marie Antoinette end the Gallic Taghairm, to unforeseen effect?

"It was already evening when, near the Echinades Islands, the wind dropped, and the ship drifted near Paxi. . . . Suddenly from the island of Paxi was heard the voice of someone loudly calling Thamus, so that all were amazed. Thamus was an Egyptian pilot, not known by name even to many on board. Twice he was called and made no reply,

but the third time he answered; and the caller, raising his voice, said, 'When you come opposite to Palodes, announce that the Great God Pan is dead.'"

-- Plutarch, "De Defectu Oraculorum," *Moralia* 419

And those threads come back around still earlier in our story, or in a still earlier version of our story. In this version, the person who hears the mysterious instruction is Thamus, the pilot of a boat in the Aegean, who hears a disembodied voice from over the water cry out, "When you come opposite to Palodes, announce that the Great God Pan is dead." Just like the crofter in the story, he repeats this enigmatic pronouncement when he gets to the island of Palodes -- which erupts in yowls and roars of agony and mourning. As Santillana and von Dechend put it in *Hamlet's Mill*, "The bearer of the message may be an unknown pilot, a passerby, an animal, a watcher. The substance is that a Power has passed away, and that the succession is open." Commentators have noted the similarity in names between Thamus the pilot and Tammuz, the dying corn god of Babylonia -- which takes us right back around to our Corn Cats, dying in the fires of France at midsummer -- the time of Tammuz' death, as it turns out.

"You know, I made a pact with cats, with the King of the Cats -- it goes back very, very far. And it's extraordinary (it happened in Tlemcen, entirely on the occult plane), extraordinary! For certain reasons, the King of the Cats gave me a power over these creatures -- and it's true. Only I have to see them . . . Cats are vital forces, incarnations of vital forces. The King of the Cats -- that is, the spirit of the species -- is a being of the vital world. For instance, cats can very easily incarnate the vital force of a dead person. I have had two absolutely astounding experiences of this."

-- Mira Alfassa ("The Mother"), *Agenda*, April 12, 1961

Mira Alfassa, the spiritual Mother to Sri Aurobindo, is only the latest and most exalted of our seeresses (or witches, if you prefer) to be bound up with the King of the Cats. His feline majesty was named in the occasional trial as the lord of the coven, and he was the object of [Erzsebet Bathory's](#) bloody prayers. We can draw out a trail connecting the King of the Cats, the Black Man of the sabbats, and Adonis-Tammuz the Dying God. The cat in the cornfield serves as [scarecrow](#), as [scapegoat](#), and as harvest king by turns. When we connect cats and kings (and at least one Scots writer explicitly connects the custom of buttering a cat's paws to keep it in the house to the anointing of the king with oil), we necessarily connect kings and cats. Or queens -- does the death of Marie Antoinette tell us something, something like the tale of three cats in Strasbourg around 1590? According to the inquisitors, a woodcutter defending himself against three large, aggressive cats chopped each of them with his axe -- after which identical wounds appeared on three leading ladies of the city. A very similar tale recurs in the legal records of Thurso in Scotland in 1718, again with three cats wounded by an axe and like injuries appearing on local witches.

So what does it all signify, all these cries in the night, and cat-foot prints across the pages of history, from 1590 and 1718 and 1798? Or from 29 A.D. when Thamus heard the lamentations for Pan, to 544 A.D. when St. Kieran was at Clonmacnois ready to dispel Irusan, to 1765 and the end of the Cat Massacres at Metz, to 1909 and the death of Swinburne? Is this the reign of the fifth King of Cats? Or is the True King of the Cats still locked in eternal combat with the Eagle Emperor, and his death a ritual recursion in their struggle, cyclical time impinging on linear time by a calendar known only to Bast and Cybele? There are too many loose trails, too many flicking pieces of yarn to follow. What of [Dick Whittington](#), or [Robert "the Cat" Catesby](#), or John Keats, plagued by [vampires](#) and with a cat on his family crest? What then of cats drinking the breath of babies, swallowing souls to reincarnate themselves? Are Big Ears and Irusan the first of the "phantom cats" (also called ABCs, Anomalous Big Cats) seen all across Britain to this day, padding about looking for uppity bards or careless Scots sorcerers? Is the King of the Cats the [maneless King of the Beasts](#) as well? Someone is yowling a message for us to pass on, something very important but unclear. I can't make it out, myself. But if you see Tom Tildrum, tell him that the Great God Pan is dead. Or vice versa.

The Good Doctor and His Creations

for *GURPS*

by Bevan Thomas

We live in a technological age, and the mad scientist is the embodiment of technology and science run amok. Dr. Heinrich von Reichtor is a model mad scientist, a horrific reminder of the times that science does not heal, but instead destroys.

A brilliant bioengineer, von Reichtor could not accept the loss of his wife, and is trying anything and everything to bring her back to life. He seeks to recreate the one perfect thing he has ever had, and in doing so he is creating monsters.

Heinrich von Reichtor

220 Points

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 15 [100]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1[0]; BL 16 lbs. [0]; HP 9 [0]; Will 13 [-10]; Per 15 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Contact Group (underworld, effective skill 15, fairly often, somewhat reliable) [10]; High Manual Dexterity 1 [5]; Status 2 [10]; Wealthy [20]

Disadvantages: Dependents (his creations, around quite often) [-20]; Insomniac (severe) [-15]; Lamé (crippled) [-10]; Loner (12) [-5]; Nightmares (12) [-5]; Obsession (resurrect wife) (12) [-10]; Phantom Voices (dead wife)(disturbing) [-10]; Shyness (severe) [-10]; Workaholic [-5]

Quirks: Careful [-1]; Proud (intelligence) [-1].

Languages: English (Accented) [4]; German (Native) [0]; Homeric Greek (Accented) [4]; Latin (Accented) [4].

Skills: Area Knowledge (his city)-15 [1]; Bioengineering (cloning)-18 [16]; Bioengineering-(genetic) 18 [16]; Bioengineering (tissue)-18 [16]; Biology-16 [12]; Chemistry-16 [8]; Computer Operation-15 [1]; Diagnosis-16 [8]; Drive (automobile)-10 [1]; Expert Skill (thanatology)-17 [12]; Games (chess)-15 [1]; Literature-13 [1]; Musical Instrument (violin)-13 [2]; Observation-14 [1]; Physician-16 [8]; Physiology-16 [8]; Research-17 [8]; Surgery-17 [16]; Veterinary-14 [2]; Weird Science-17 [16]; Writing-14 [1]

Appearance

Dr. Heinrich von Reichtor is a tall, slim man with haunted gray eyes. Though only in his mid-30s, his long brown hair has become streaked with gray. His troubles have made him old before his time. When at home, the doctor usually wears black pajamas, slippers, and dressing gown. The few times that he deigns to get dressed, Dr. von Reichtor favors rumpled black pants accompanied by black turtlenecks and tweed jackets. Wherever he goes, he leans heavily on his black walking stick.

Background

He met her in university, and from the first time he gazed into her eyes, he knew that he was in love.

Heinrich von Reichtor was the last of a long line of German aristocracy. A shy, retiring man, he had no interest in his wealth nor in most people, but devoted his time to the biological sciences and to a lesser extent, flights of fancy through reading romantic poetry and Greek mythology.

She was Catherine Summers, the most beautiful woman in the school, and the only person who Heinrich had ever met who he found as intelligent as himself. Despite his mangled right leg, plain features, and nervous manner, she was as drawn to him as he was to her.

They decided to wait a year to get married, the day after they would receive their PhDs. That year was heaven for Heinrich. Even his parents' death during that time did little to hurt his spirits. After all, he was engaged to Catherine Summers. How could anything compare to that?

The day they married was the happiest of von Reichtor's life; it was a dream come true. But that night was the beginning of his nightmare. Catherine began to get sick, and over the next few days she got even sicker. No one knew what was wrong with her. All von Reichtor knew was that his wife was dying in his arms, and his vaunted intellect could not save her.

He sequestered himself and Catherine in one of his mansions as he worked feverishly to save her life. After she slipped into a coma, he knew her death was near, and so he placed her inside a prototype he had developed. It was a glass casket, filled with a chemical solution that would place her in suspended animation until she could be brought back from the jaws of death.

That was years ago, and since then, Heinrich von Reichtor's sanity has crumbled.

The von Reichtor fortune is dwindling as the doctor spends his time and money hunting for a miracle cure. As his madness grows, von Reichtor's experiments become less and less related to his wife, becoming simply the indulgence of a morbid curiosity. He tried to animate dead bodies to see if it was possible to return the spirit to the flesh, creating the behemoth Atlas. In a moment of desperation, he tried to "grow" a new Catherine, and made Metis. Now he is grafting human brain tissue onto animals, creating creatures like Aristotle the raven. Only von Reichtor knows what his next experiment will be.

As his mind deteriorates, so do his morals. He pays criminals to deliver corpses from graveyards for use in his experiments, and he has started to perform vivisection. These actions would have horrified him a short time ago, but now it is only a matter of time before he targets living humans. He has reached the point that if anyone were a danger to him or his work, he'd consider strapping that person to his operating table to be an appropriate way of eliminating the problem.

The doctor rarely sees anyone. In fact, he almost never leaves the house unless it is on some errand relating to his research. His only companions are the strange creatures he's created, particularly Metis. He treats the homunculus as halfway between a daughter and a pet, and has taught her various things, including how to play chess. One of the only times that he smiles is when she sings or dances in accompaniment to his violin.

Dr. von Reichtor's bed is beside Catherine's casket. However, he almost never sleeps, for when he does, he is beset by hideous nightmares in which his wife dies before his eyes again and again. Even being awake does not allow him to escape her apparition, for he often hears her voice in the back of his mind. Sometimes she is singing or calling gently to him, other times she is a screeching banshee, demanding to know why he is letting her die. Worst of all, sometimes she simply cries out a death rattle that lasts for minutes. When that happens, Dr. von Reichtor collapses to the ground, places his hands over his ears, and begs her over and over to stop.

Even in her demi-death, Catherine von Reichtor is beautiful. She floats in a bath of chemicals, her long black hair forming a halo around her head as her pale, delicate hands are clasped over her still bosom. She is dressed in her wedding gown, though the veil is thrown back in order for her lovely face to be clearly seen. Her eyes are closed, giving the appearance of someone sleeping peacefully. She looks like Snow White in a glass coffin, a resemblance von Reichtor has noticed and draws a grim humor from.

Heinrich von Reichtor often stares at her vat for hours, kissing and caressing it tenderly while he sings to his wife all the songs that she loved.

Mad Scientist

151 Points

The mad scientist is a modern version of the black magician, a radical scholar who seeks to know Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. Depending upon his area of interest, he may use bioengineering to evolve animals, computer programming to create artificial life, engineering to build a machine to travel dimensions, or something even further beyond the pale. Whatever his motives and techniques, he is as insane as he is brilliant.

Many mad scientists seek knowledge or power for their own selfish ends, but some have noble goals. These scholars may seek to cure world hunger, heal the environment, or eliminate disease, but during their quests, they have lost touch with reality. This sort of mad scientist is the most tragic, for he sought to give hope, and now only delivers terror.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 15 [100]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1[0]; BL 16 lbs. [0]; HP 9 [0]; Will 13 [-10]; Per 15 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Language (Latin or some other scientific language)(Accented) [4] and 25 points chosen from among Allies (minion) [Varies]; Cybernetics [Varies]; Eidetic Memory [5 or 10]; Gadgeteer [25]; Gizmos [5 /gizmo]; High Manual Dexterity [5/level]; Languages [Varies]; Less Sleep [2/level]; Lightning Calculator [2 or 5]; Patron [Varies]; Reputation (respected scientist) [Varies]; Talent [Varies]; Tenure [5]; Unfazeable [15]; and Wealth [Varies].

Disadvantages: -20 points to represent the Mad Scientist's insanity, chosen from Delusions [-5 to -15]; Fanaticism [-15]; Flashbacks [Varies]; Low Empathy [-20]; Manic-Depressive [-10]; Megalomania [-10]; Nightmares [-5]; Obsession [-5 or -10]; Paranoia [-10]; Phantom Voices [-5 to -15]; Phobias [Varies]; Sadism [-15]; and Xenophilia [-10] and an additional -20 points chosen from the list above or from Absent-Mindedness [-15]; Bad Sight (Mitigator: Glasses, -60%) [-10]; Bad Temper [-10]; Callous [-5]; Curious [-5]; Enemies [Varies]; Greed [-15]; Hunchback [-10]; Intolerance [Varies]; Jealousy [-10]; Lane [-10 or -20]; Overconfidence [-5]; Proud [-1]; Reputation [Varies]; Secret [-5 to -20]; Sense of Duty [-2 to -20]; Social Stigma [Varies]; Stubbornness [-5]; and Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills: Weird Science (VH) IQ +2 [16]-17 and one skill from: Bioengineering, Chemistry, Computer Programming (AI), or Engineer, all (H) IQ +3 [16]-18; or Alchemy (VH) IQ +2 [16]-17.

Secondary Skills: Research IQ (A) +2 [8]-17 and 20 points worth of skills that support the mad scientist's primary skill (for example, a mad scientist who focuses on Bioengineering would have Biology, Physician, and Physiology, whereas one who specializes in Computer Programming [AI] would instead select Computer Hacking, Computer Operation, and normal Computer Programming).

Background Skills: Select two skills from: Interrogation, Teaching, or Writing, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; or Intimidation (A) Will-1 [1]-12; or Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-14; or Cryptography or Hypnotism, both (H) IQ-2 [1]-13.

The Doctor's Creations

These are the three most prominent creations of Dr. Heinrich von Reichtor. They represent three archetypes of mad scientists' experiments: the forcibly evolved animal, the human behemoth, and the homunculus, and so can serve as simple templates for different creations. Other minions can be added, whether similar to the listed ones (such as Ajax, another product of the experiment that created Atlas) or entirely new (for example, a semi-sapient goo that von Reichtor accidentally created from a piece of Catherine's skin and spit).

Aristotle

81 Points

Attributes: ST 3 (no fine manipulators -40%) [-42]; **DX** 14 (no fine manipulators -40%) [48]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 10 [0]

Secondary Characteristics: SM -4; Dmg 1d-5/1d-4 [0]; BL 1.8; HP 6 [8]; Will 11 [0]; Per 14 [15]; FP 10 [0]; Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 2 (ground) [-20].

Advantages: Acute Vision 3 [6]; Eidetic Memory [5]; Enhanced Move 1 (Air Speed 24) [20]; Flight (Winged -25%; Air Move 12) [30]; Patron (Dr. von Reichtor, present quite often) [30]; Sharp Beak [1]; Sharp Claws [5]

Disadvantages: Curious (12) [-5]; Kleptomania (12) [-15]; Nightmares (12) [-5]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Odious Personal Habit (eats carrion) [-10]; Phantom Voices (disturbing) [-10]; Phobia (Triskaidekaphobia) (12) [-5]

Quirks: Distractible [-1]; Uncongenial [-1]

Languages: English (Accented) [4]; German (Native) [0]

Skills: Area Knowledge (his city)-13 [4]; Brawling-14 [1]; Detect Lies-14 [4]; Dropping-14 [2]; Filch-14 [2]; Flight-11 [4]; Lip Reading-14 [2]; Mimicry (speech)-11 [4]; Navigation (air)-11 [2]; Observation-14 [2]; Stealth-15 [4]; Urban Survival-14 [2]

Appearance

Aristotle looks like a large, normal raven.

Background

Aristotle is a raven whom Dr. von Reichtor vivisected. The bird has had human brain tissue grafted onto his mind, and so can talk and reason like a human. Immensely curious, as well as being grateful for his new intelligence, Aristotle serves as an informant and spy for his "boss," finding things out as only a bird can.

But recent events have started to unnerve the raven. He has been having strange nightmares and invisible people yelling in his ears. He keeps getting flashes of memories that he has never experienced. He thinks the different parts of his brain are warring against each other, each one trying to gain control. For some reason, Aristotle is now terrified by the number 13. He doesn't know why. He just knows he will never fly over a house numbered thirteen ever again. He's afraid that if Dr. von Reichtor found out about all of this, the doctor might just abort the experiment and turn Aristotle back into a normal raven. So Aristotle has been keeping quiet, and been desperately hoping that the voices in his head will go away.

Atlas

93 Points

Attributes: ST 22 [120]; **DX** 8[-40]; **IQ** 6 [-80]; **HT** 14 [40]

Secondary Characteristics: SM +1; Dmg 2d/4d [0]; BL 97 [0]; HP 22 [0]; Will 6 [0]; Per 9 [15]; FP 14 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Damage Resistance 2 (tough skin -40%) [6]; Fearlessness 5 [10]; Hard to Kill 3 [6]; Hard to Subdue 3 [6]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 5 [5]; Patron (Dr. von Reichtor, present quite often) [30]

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Berserk (12) [-10]; Curious (12) [-5]; Gullibility (12) [-10]; Odious Personal Habit (smells of formaldehyde) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Metis) [-2]; Ugly [-8]

Quirks: Humble [-1]; Likes Cats [-1]

Languages: German: Spoken (Broken)/Written (None) [-7]

Skills: Brawling-11 [8]; Intimidation-11 (includes bonus for size) [16]

Appearance

Atlas is a mountain of a man, eight feet tall with rippling muscles and a wide, brutish face. He has no hair of any kind, and his bright yellow eyes reflect an innocence that seems out of place with the rest of his monstrous form. He dresses simply in T-shirt and jeans, and the stench of formaldehyde radiates from his body.

Background

Atlas was Dr. von Reichtor's first semi-successful attempt at life. After various bodies the doctor attempted to reanimate proved too weak for the process, he injected one corpse with a specially treated steroids and hormones. He finally made it powerful enough to survive the process, and laughed with joy as the muscled-up corpse began to slowly move its limbs.

However, the creature he created was not quite what he expected. Though the brute, dubbed Atlas after the mightiest titan in Greek mythology, possesses vast strength and durability, he also has the intelligence of an infant and is prone to dangerous mood swings. The slightest thing can set Atlas off, causing him to fly into a deadly fury which only Dr. von Reichtor and Metis are able to quiet. When Atlas isn't assigned to a task, he is usually in his room sucking his thumb, whistling a nonsense tune, and playing with his toy cats.

Metis

112 Points

Attributes: ST 5 [-50]; DX 12 [40], IQ 12 [40]; HT 10 [0]

Secondary Characteristics: SM -4; Dmg 1d-4/1d-3 [0]; BL 5 [0]; HP 5 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Beautiful [12], Patron (Dr. von Reichtor, present quite often) [30]; Single-Minded [5]; Talent (Smooth Operator) 1 [15]

Disadvantages: Impulsiveness (12) [-10]; Jealousy [-10], Obsession (make von Reichtor love her) (12) [-5]

Quirks: Congenial [-1]; Believes she speaks perfect French and always fakes a French accent [-1]

Languages: English (Accented) [4]; French (Accented) [4]; German (Native) [0]

Skills: Acting-13* [2]; Computer Operations-12 [1]; Dancing-12 [2]; Diplomacy-11* [1]; Fast-Talk-13* [2]; Games (chess)-14 [4]; Gardening-12 [1]; History (Paris and surrounding area)-12 [4]; Hobby (fashion television shows and magazines)-14 [4]; Hobby (French fiction)-12 [1]; Hobby (romance novels)-14 [4]; Housekeeping-14 [4]; Sex Appeal-15** [2]; Sewing-14 [4]; Singing-11 [2]; Stealth-11 [1]

*Includes bonus for Smooth Operator

**Includes bonuses for Beautiful and Smooth Operator

Appearance

An artificial being created by Dr. von Reichtor in the image of his comatose wife, Metis is a beautiful woman with long silky black hair, deep blue eyes, and a softy creamy complexion. She is also slightly under a foot tall, often giving

the impression of an animated doll. Metis dresses in facsimiles of dresses she sees on TV or in magazines. She has the doctor pick up the materials, and then she makes the dresses herself. Metis loves to pretend she is a French debutante, and will almost always speak in a rich French accent. She makes certain she looks as beautiful and glamorous as possible (elegant clothes, makeup, well-groomed hair, etc.) in order to impress Heinrich von Reichtor.

Background

After his problems with Atlas, Dr. von Reichtor decided to create a human from scratch. He used DNA from his wife to grow a variation of the alchemical homunculus, a tiny woman who quickly aged to adulthood. To von Reichtor's frustration, though the creature looked like a miniature of his wife, her personality was completely different: energetic, sensual, and vivacious instead of sedate, demure, and nurturing. He sadly declared the experiment a failure, and (since she proved to be far smarter than Atlas) named his creation "Metis" after the Greek titaness who was the goddess of wisdom.

Metis quickly adapted to her new existence. She fell head-over-heels in love with von Reichtor, and immediately tried to figure out how to win his favor. After he taught her how to read, she started hunting through his library, trying to learn how to be the sort of woman whom he could love. She taught herself how to sing, dance, care for a home, and above all, how to be beautiful. All to no avail. Her beloved doctor's heart is held by a giant, comatose version of herself that floats in a vat twenty-four hours a day.

She spends most of her time looking after the house and garden, doing what chores herself that she can, and directing Atlas for those tasks too big for her little body. In her free time, she reads romance novels and fashion magazines, makes beautiful new clothing for herself, and dreams about how wonderful things will be when she and the doctor get married. Metis is at her happiest when she plays chess with Dr. von Reichtor, or better yet, when he plays his violin, and she sings and dances for him. Only then, for a few precious moments, is she able to forget that he doesn't love her.

When Dr. von Reichtor isn't around, Metis often sits and stares at Catherine. The diminutive woman is shocked by how much she has grown to hate her double. She dreams of somehow switching bodies, leaving her former self lying on some table like a broken doll as she lifts the top of the glass and loses herself in her master's loving embrace. Metis knows that this is a ridiculous hope that will never happen no matter how much she dreams. However another idea has occurred to her. Wouldn't Dr. von Reichtor pay more attention to her if Catherine were somehow made to vanish?

Dr. Von Reichtor and His Creations In the Campaign

There are various ways for the player characters to encounter Dr. von Reichtor. If the doctor is to be an ally in the campaign, the PCs could be employed by him to get or do something that would help his experiments. They might also decide to see him in order to get some advice on a particular scientific project. If he is to be an adversary, they could stumble upon grave robberies and trace the thefts back to him, or discover the nature of von Reichtor's experiments and decide to put a stop to it. Alternately, someone in Catherine's family or the scientific community may ask the PCs to investigate the doctor's strange behavior.

Von Reichtor is not the only person the characters may want to investigate. Perhaps someone has grown concerned about the raven that keeps screaming in German for the voices in its head to leave it alone, or the lumbering brute that is sometimes spotted by the docks. One of Catherine's relatives or friends might see Metis scampering down the street, and wish to discover what exactly that doppelganger was. Metis herself may also try manipulating the characters into getting rid of Catherine or helping her win von Reichtor's heart.

Dr. von Reichtor, Aristotle, and Metis avoid fights. If on their own, they try to talk their way out of problems, and if that fails, they flee. However, if they have Atlas with them, then they will rely on the brute's vast strength and fury to deal with any threats in the quickest manner possible.

If someone finds out too much about von Reichtor's experiments, or he thinks they have become a serious threat, then he will do his best to get rid of them. Nothing is more important than working to save Catherine, and any obstacles that

present themselves must be removed as quickly as possible. He will try to lure the threats to some deserted spot and then send Atlas (with Metis to direct him). Depending upon the situation, the person will either end up with a broken neck . . . or wake up strapped to von Reichtor's operating table with the doctor ready to begin his next experiment.

Those that work for the doctor can expect to be well rewarded. He is still wealthy and willing to pay for good service, and as one of the most accomplished scientists in the world, has a lot of information that player characters could find incredibly useful (particularly within the realm of medicine). He also has a massive library that contains not only scientific texts and journals, but also tomes built up from centuries of von Reichtors, each adding their own idiosyncratic reading material to the collection.

If the PCs are von Reichtor's opponents, then they can profit by taking his rare books and finding an appropriate buyer for them. Some are rare and prized, and could be sold for thousands. The PCs could make off with his various formulas and experiments as well, but unless they are very lucky, this sort of tampering with forbidden secrets would cause more harm than good.

Variations

Here are some ways to reinterpret Dr. von Reichtor in other situations and settings.

The Alchemist

In a campaign with TL 1-4, Dr. von Reichtor is an alchemist instead of a bioengineer. As there are far less science skills in these environments, the doctor has branched out more, studying religion, nature, and the occult in an attempt to find a way of bringing back Catherine. Replace his skills with the following (his point cost remains the same):

Area Knowledge (his city)-15 [1]; Alchemy-18 [20]; Broadsword-10 [1]; Diagnosis-16 [8]; Expert Skill (natural philosophy)-17 [12]; Expert Skill (thanatology)-17 [12]; Games (chess)-15 [1]; Herb Lore-15 [8]; Literature-13 [1]; Musical Instrument (flute)-13 [2]; Naturalist-17 [12]; Observation-15 [2]; Occultism-17 [8]; Pharmacy (herbal)-16 [8]; Physiology-16 [8]; Research-17 [8]; Riding (horse)-11 [2]; Thaumatology-17 [16]; Theology (comparative)-16 [8]; Weird Science-17 [16]; Writing-14 [1]

In this version, Metis is a homunculus from *GURPS Magic* (p. 221), while Atlas may be a homunculus, a golem created from flesh instead of clay, or a strange variation of a zombie.

Von Reichtor could be a wizard as well, delving into magic for a solution to his tragic problem. He would focus on the colleges of Healing and Necromancy in his experiments, and also make extensive use of the college of Knowledge.

Von Reichtor the alchemist could be used in a modern setting as well. In that situation, keep most of his normal skills, but replace the various versions of Bioengineering with Alchemy, Occultism, and Thaumatology.

The Mad Test Subject

Given enough time, Von Reichtor might experiment on himself, whether to boost his own intelligence or to test some techniques that he is thinking of using on his wife. (His insanity may also reach a point where he experiments on himself for the sake of experimentation). There are many alterations he could do, from grafting other people's brain tissue to his own to stimulating his consciousness with special chemicals to attempting to gain psionics.

A particularly deranged possibility is for him to try and recreate Catherine by becoming her. After all, if he was in fact her, then not only would von Reichtor no longer have any reason to feel tormented, but there would be no "he" to be tormented! For the doctor to come to this decision, his sense of self would have to be completely broken, and Metis would do all in her power to stop the transformation.

Mad Science in Spaaaaace!

Dr. von Reichtor may be doing his studies on his own space station or private planetoid, creating new life forms and maybe even new ecosystems as his experiments spin further and further out of control. In such a situation, he would probably be proficient in Area Knowledge (his planet or space station), Pilot (spacecraft), and other appropriate extra-planetary skills, and might have decided to branch out into robotics to investigate the idea of creating a mechanical body to house his wife's consciousness.

If the doctor and his creations are on a different planet, Aristotle would probably be created from a life-form native to there, and possibly so would Atlas (unless they had been brought in the spaceship).

The Dustmaster

Road Trains for *Transhuman Space*

by Royce Easton Day

The End of an Era: America/Mars Announces Last of the Dustmaster Road Trains to be Taken Out of Service

Reported by Teri Chow, for Teralogos News

Port Lowell, Mars (1/14) Representatives of the Martian Commonwealth Transportation Agency announced today that the last of the venerable Dustmaster road trains will be removed from their regular run between Plymouth and Anchorage. Assistant Director Peggy Kwan is quoted as saying, "With a new spur being added to the Equatorial Railway almost every two months, and the ever increasing traffic of independent cargo haulers represented by the Truckers Guild, we no see the need to continue the expensive government support the Dustmasters required."

The Dustmaster trains, known fondly by many as the "Rustmasters" for the inevitable patina of Martian soil that coated their hulls, were a key component in the early years of the United State's expansion across the Red Planet. Built in the late 2030s almost entirely (excepting their onboard nuclear reactors) from components manufactured on Mars, the Dustmasters provided critical heavy, long-range cargo movement for the scattered American colonies for over 60 years. Capable of hauling about 400,000 Martian pounds of cargo in up to six separate trailers, the Dustmasters could transport entire startup colonies, including the colonists, to their new homes in a single journey. In addition it could tow other specialized trailers such as the Mobile Lab, which was carried during the famed USAGS overland expedition that discovered the first of the Mars Conspiracy's ozone factories.

"Really, the Dustmasters are victims of their own success," says Manuel Orico, a former Dustmaster maintenance engineer and current member of the Trucker's Guild. "They did the job of putting together America/Mars. Now they have to step aside and let the little guys like me pull up the slack."

"I think we're losing a critical transportation resource," countered Erica Montalban, Vice-President of Mars Development Corp's Transport Division. "A single Dustmaster can haul almost seven times the amount of cargo that an average cargo truck can, and it can keep that cargo moving through the day and night, without any need to stop to refuel. That's incredibly useful for independent colonists wanting to start their own community, away from well-worn travel routes."

That's true, admits Orico, but then he exclaims, "Ai! The routine maintenance was a killer when I worked on them. The drivers would haul their trains back into the shop after being out for a month or more in the field, and it would be four weeks at minimum before we could get them back on the road. But the real kicker was the

RTGs. Yeah, they keep the Dustmaster going non-stop, but every 14 years or so they need to be swapped out to the tune of over a million dollars a pop. I think it was miracle that the Commonwealth managed to scam Congress into paying for the last replacement cycle."

At the height of their popularity in 60s through the 80s, there were at least 30 road trains operating all across Mars, hauling everything from robofac to refrigeration units. That number dwindled to less than 10 in the early 90s, and then only three trains (one of which was being cannibalized for parts) maintaining the Plymouth-Anchorage route.

Despite pleas to the CTA and to the US Congress, no plans are currently underway to restart or replace the Dustmaster program. Many fans of the Dustmaster have suggested replacing the expensive RTG's with conventional hydrogen engines, but critics point out that the size of the necessary hydrogen power plant and its tankage would eliminate much of the Dustmaster's famed cargo capacity and range.

However, fans of the Dustmaster won't have to worry about it disappearing completely. Orico, thanks to generous donations from fellow Truckers Guild members, has transferred his ghost into the computer of Dustmaster No. 12, which operated from 2048 to 2085, before being transferred to the Commonwealth National Guard and recently sold for scrap. With the aid of his fellow Guild members, Orico intends to refurbish No. 12 to full working order, including the RTG. Until then, he's content to rebuild one of the cargo trailers the Guild also acquired into a portable museum displaying the Dustmaster's place in Martian history.

"I'm going to haul myself all over the Commonwealth and beyond," Orico claims, "so people can step aboard and see what the Dustmaster did to help build the homes they live in today. Sure it'd be cheaper to just to create a VR museum for them to access, but then they wouldn't have a chance to take a ride in the real thing."

Adventure Seeds

Of course Orico's Dustmaster doesn't have to be the only one that's managed to fall into private hands. With sufficient ingenuity, a group of PCs could find any number of interesting things to do with theirs. Some ideas are:

Von Ryu's Express: A mining corporation in a politically neutral section of Mars has been abusing their bioroid workforce beyond all acceptable standards. In retaliation, the bioroids broke their memetic programming and fought back, killing many guards and stealing a Dustmaster with a Pullman and two cargo trailers. Now it's a race across the deserts of Mars, as the bioroids try to reach a safe haven inside Chinese territory, while the mining corporation attempts to hunt them down without bringing the incident to the attention of either the Chinese or the Americans.

"We got a long way to go/And a short time to get there": There's plenty of alcohol to be had on Mars, but genuine hundred-year-old booze is another thing entirely. The PCs are truckers hired to pick up three cargo trailers worth of incredibly valuable Irish whiskey for transport from New Shanghai to the estate of one of the Millionaires of Mars in time for an exclusive soiree he's throwing. The pay is more than worth it, even if you consider that the adventurers have been given the wrong receiver's slip and have to steal the whiskey that their boss rightfully bought, then have to haul it literally halfway across Mars, while avoiding sabotage attempts by their employer's equally rich rivals who want to spoil the party, not to mention that crazy Marshall who seems to have a bug up his tailpipe over the woman the heroes picked up along the way . . .

Mars Wars: The B/r/o/t/h/e/r/h/o/o/d . . . er, the Trucker's Guild has finally run into some serious opposition. Mars Direct, a new trucking corporation, is attempting to undercut the independent truckers with cut rate pricing. When that

doesn't work, unexpected ambushes start befalling lonely Guild members in the dusty expanse between destinations. Authorities have investigated the incidents, but no definite link between the accidents and Mars Direct has been found yet. Investigators blame the Martian Triads, but a few Guild members have other suspicions.

Now the Guild has a restored Dustmaster set to haul materials to a high-profile startup colony. The Guild has advertised loudly that this will be proof of their members' reliability and safety. In other words, it's a setup to lure Mars Direct into tipping their hand. One of the Dustmaster's trailers has been modified to conceal a pair of weapon turrets, while the other two hide several off-road vehicles with weapons of their own, in the hopes of catching any attackers off guard.

Can the Ares AutoDuelling Association be far behind?

Campaigning

For players with a gearhead frame of mind, GMs could do worse than to give them their own used road train to play with. Dustmasters served the same purpose as the railroad did during the early days of the American West, transporting cargo and passengers with reasonable swiftness over sometimes hostile terrain. Of course the PC's would be faced with the problem of having a ground truck that has a maintenance overhead similar to that of some small spaceships, and a shortage of areas where it can park.

Besides the contemporary adventure seeds presented, a Dustmaster would also serve well as a mobile base for a historical Mars campaign. Able to traverse most Martian terrain, and carry loads more economically than a spacecraft or hopper, Dustmasters would be used extensively in the early days of American/Mars development, traveling colony to colony carrying vital supplies, needed technicians, and greenhorn colonists. The local Dustmaster arriving in town might be the only physical contact a colony has with the outside world for months at a time, and its crew a welcome source of news outside official communication channels.

Dustmaster Tractor

This is the basic tractor. It can support two crew members for 30 days of continuous operation. The cargo area is slightly less than a standard Martian cargo truck, but this is compensated for by its tremendous hauling capacity. Critical communications and navigation sensors have backups, as the Dustmaster was designed to operate in the field early in Mars colonial history, far away from conventional rescue or support. It can be operated by a single driver, relying on the NAI to drive while he sleeps, but a co-driver/cargo master is commonly carried as a backup, or simply as company for the very long haul.

Crew: Drivers (Driving (Heavy Wheeled), Electronics Operation (Sensors), Electronics Operation (Communications))

Subassemblies: Body +6, full-rotation turret [T:Body] -3, ten off-road wheels +4.

Powertrain: 4000-kW all-wheel drive. 4100-kW RTG. Two rechargeable twin E cells with 40 kWh total capacity.

Endurance: RTG provides 14 years of power. Batteries can power life support for 40 hours.

Occupancy: 2 RCS, 1 cabin. **Cargo:** 3,750 cf.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
All:	4/10	4/10	4/10	4/10	4/10

Equipment:

Body: Small complexity 6 computer with backup, two 10,000-mile range radios, 2 internal navigation systems, safety module, winch [F], remote hitch, small airlock, 60 man-day limited lifesystem.

Turret: Light sensor suite.

Statistics: **Size:** 10'×16'×30' **Payload:** 76,120 **Ewt:** 69,025 lbs. **Lwt:** 145,145 lbs. **Lwt. On Mars:** 55,155 lbs. **Volume:** 6,000 cf. **Maint:** 15 hours. **Price:** \$1,746,386

HT: 12 **HP:** 6,000 [Bod] 4 [Tur] 180 [each Whl]

Performance (on Mars)

gSpeed road/off-road (no trailers): 210/55 **gAccel:** 10 **gDecel:** 20 **gMR:** 1

gSR: 6

gSpeed (one cargo trailer): 150/40 **gAccel:** 5

gSpeed (two cargo trailers): 125/30 **gAccel:** 5

gSpeed (three cargo trailers): 110/25 **gAccel:** 5

gSpeed (four cargo trailers): 95/25 **gAccel:** 4

gSpeed (five cargo trailers): 90/20 **gAccel:** 4

gSpeed (six cargo trailers): 80/20 **gAccel:** 4

Design Notes: WVMDS design. Immense body and 0.05 VSP turret with heavy frames. Wheels have improved suspension, improved brakes, all-wheel drive, smartwheels, and are puncture resistant. Armor is steel and body is sealed. Ground Pressure: High.

Cargo Trailer

The basic cargo trailer, used for 90% of the Dustmaster's missions. The trailer is little more than an airtight box the size of a standard cargo container set on wheels. There have no inherent power or life support connections, so anyone traveling in the trailer will have to be either Mars adapted or bring their own oxygen (or both, if they're sealed in with no way to open the doors.)

Crew: None.

Subassemblies: Body +6, ten off-road wheels +4.

Cargo: 5,000 cf.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
All:	4/10	4/10	4/10	4/10	4/10

Equipment

Body: Trailer pin, remote hitch.

Statistics

Size: 10'×16'×30' **Payload:** 100,000 lbs. **Ewt:** 45,200 lbs. **Lwt:** 145,200 lbs. **Lwt. on Mars:** 55,176 lbs. **Volume:** 6,000 cf. **Maint:** 26 hours **Price:** \$575, 250

HT: 12 **HP:** 6000 [Bod] 180 [each Whl]

Design Notes: WVMDS design. Immense body with heavy frame. Wheels have all-wheel drive, improved suspension, improved brakes, smartwheels, and are puncture resistant. Armor is steel and the body is sealed. Ground Pressure: High.

Flatbed Trailer

Similar to the cargo trailer, but delete all armor and sealing.

Statistics

Size: 10'×4'×30' **Payload:** 200,000 lbs.

Ewt.: 35,200 lbs. **Lwt.:** 235,300 lbs.
Lwt. On Mars: 89,376 lbs.
Volume: 6000 cf. **Maint:** 27 hours **Price:** \$549,500

HT: 12 **HP:** 6000 [Bod] 180 [each Whl]

Tanker Trailer

A multipurpose trailer, the tanker is designed to transport up to 30,000 gallons of liquid in one 20,000 and one 10,000 gallon tank. Usually it's used as a mobile gas station for conventional hydrox powered vehicles that are accompanying the Dustmaster. The built-in fuel electrolysis unit can process up to 240 gallons of water into 378 gallons hydrogen and 180 gallons of oxygen and hour. At that rate it would take a little over two days of continuous operation to fill both tanks to capacity, so they are usually topped off before a journey begins.

Crew: None.

Subassemblies: Body +6, ten off-road wheels +4.

Power: None. Power for the electrolysis unit is provided by the tractor (only when both are parked, obviously.)

Cargo: One 20,000 gallon storage tank, and one 10,000 gallon storage tank.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
All:	4/10	4/10	4/10	4/10	4/10

Equipment

One 20,000 gallon standard tank, one 10,000 gallon standard tank, six fuel electrolysis modules, remote hitch, trailer pin.

Statistics:

Size: 10'×16'×30' **Payload:** 107,600 lbs.
Ewt.: 83,300 lbs. **Lwt.:** 190,900 lbs.
Lwt. on Mars: 72,542 lbs.
Volume: 6,000 cf. **Maint:** 25 hours. **Price:** \$647,000

HT: 12 **HP:** 6,000 [Body] 180 [each Whl]

Design Notes: WVMDS design. Immense body with heavy frame. Wheels have all-wheel drive, improved suspension, improved brakes, smartwheels, and are puncture resistant. Armor is steel and body is sealed. Ground Pressure: High.

Pullman Trailer

The standard passenger trailer for the Dustmaster. Each Pullman can carry eighteen passengers in nine cabins, with life support and food for 30 days travel. Power normally is provided by the Dustmaster's RTG, but there are two twin E-cells connected to rooftop solar panels for emergency backup.

Crew: None. If VIP's are carried, then a pair of stewards usually occupies one cabin.

Subassemblies: Body +6, ten off-road wheels +4

Power: 2 × twin E-cells, 250 sq. ft. solar cells on roof.

Occupancy: 9 cabins. **Cargo:** 300 cf.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U

All: 4/10 4/10 4/10 4/10 4/10

Equipment

Body: 540-man/day limited lifesystem, two 10,000-mile range radios, safety module, large airlock, remote hitch, trailer pin.

Statistics:

Size: 10'×16'×30' **Payload:** 10,080 lbs.

Ewt: 69,815 lbs. **Lwt:** 79,895 lbs.

Lwt. on Mars: 33,460 lbs.

Volume: 6,000 cf. **Maint:** 23 hours. **Price:** \$755,000.

HT: 12 **HP:** 6,000 [Bod] 180 [each Whl]

Design Notes: WVMDs design. Immense body with heavy frame. Wheels have all-wheel drive, improved suspension, improved brakes, smartwheels, and are puncture resistant. Armor is steel and body is sealed. Ground Pressure: Low.

Mobile Lab

The Mobile Lab is used for long-range scientific expeditions. It has three separate science labs, an upgraded sensor suite, and can support 10 scientists for 30 days in the field. It also features a veterinary surgery for treating 'native' Martian life, a workshop for maintenance of remote science stations, and four microframes for any ghosts or high-end AI's to use. It also has a roomy cargo area for any other equipment the expedition might need.

Crew: Up to ten scientists, vets, and/or maintenance engineers.

Subassemblies: Body +6, full-rotation turret [T: Body] -1, ten off-road wheels +4.

Power: Two twin E-cells.

Occupancy: None. Usually a Pullman trailer accompanies the lab to give the lab's crew a place to sleep. **Cargo:** 2,000 cf.

Armor **F** **RL** **B** **T** **U**
All: 4/10 4/10 4/10 4/10 4/10

Equipment:

Body: Four microframes, two 10,000 mile-range radios, safety module, compact manufacturing workshop, three science laboratories, veterinary surgery, large airlock, 300 man/day limited lifesystem, remote hitch, trailer pin.

Turret: Medium sensor suite.

Statistics:

Size: 10'×16'×30' **Payload:** 20,000 lbs.

Ewt.: 116,991 lbs. **Lwt.:** 136,991 lbs.

Lwt. on Mars: 52,057 lbs.

Volume: 6,000 cf. **Maint:** 10 hours. **Price:** \$4,080,384.

HT: 12 **HP:** 6000 [Bod] 180 [each Whl] 17 [Turret]

Design Notes: WVMDs design. Immense body and 0.5 VSP turret with heavy frames. Wheels have all-wheel drive, improved suspension, improved brakes, smartwheels, and are puncture resistant. Armor is steel and body is sealed. Ground Pressure: High.

The Power of Illumination

by Bevan Thomas

They are the Invisible Ones, the Powers That Be, the Men of Knowledge, the Secret Masters. Lords of the Conspiracy and Kings of This Earth. People who have been granted visions and power far beyond those of lesser men. They are the Illuminati, and we are pawns in their games.

The **GURPS Basic Set** uses an advantage entitled "Illuminated" to describe the core powers of the Illuminati. This advantage is worth 15 points and grants the character three abilities: the power to recognize on sight anyone who is likewise Illuminated, the power to know if Illuminati are responsible for particular events, and the power to perceive and communicate with supernatural beings that are tied to Illuminated conspiracies. Though this advantage does grant the Illuminati some unique abilities, it keeps them on more-or-less the same power level as other characters. Though this is appropriate for some Illuminated campaigns, mythology and literature are filled with characters whose enlightenment grants them the ability to work wonders, such as the siddhar of Tantric lore, the prophets of the Bible, and the Illuminati of the *Illuminatus!* trilogy.

This article explores how different advantages and disadvantages can be linked with Illumination, allowing the GM to make the Secret Masters beings of power and customize their abilities to suit his campaign. Though of most obvious relevance to a **GURPS Illuminati** campaign, it is useful in any setting where those who are enlightened or divinely chosen gain access to supernatural powers.

The Might Shared By All

The most obvious way to enhance the powers of the Illuminati is to make "Illuminatus" a "meta-trait" (**Basic Set**, p. 262), granting new advantages and disadvantages to all the enlightened. A example of such a meta-trait is found in **GURPS Illuminati**. This version of Illuminated contains all its abilities from the **Basic Set**, but adds Intuition and the 30 point version of Luck, which in *Fourth Edition* would make the cost of the meta-trait 70 points. However, there are many other ways to customize the powers of the Illuminati.

Being Illuminated is usually envisioned as supernatural insight, and in addition to Intuition, any advantage identified with "ESP" would be appropriate, particularly Channeling, Medium, Oracle, and Precognition. They could be treated as psionics, or instead as derived from another source, such as God, spirits, or even the energy of Creation itself.

The Blessed advantage deserves special attention, as it is the most evocative and generally apropos advantage to include in the Illuminati meta-trait (next to the Illuminated advantage itself, of course). Divine visions is the power most often accredited to enlightened individuals, be they Abrahamic prophets, Eastern gurus, or even disciples of Illuminated orders (who often receive cryptic messages from spectral secret chiefs). Furthermore, Blessed has the most scope for variety on the part of the Game Master, allowing him to tailor the visions and the patrons who send them to suit his campaign.

Variations of Luck can also be suitable for an Illuminatus -- not only the 30 point version, but the 60 point Luck, Super Luck, and particularly levels of Serendipity can be used to define Illuminati who are so attuned with the universe that reality begins to accommodate their wishes.

Depending upon how the Game Master wishes to treat Illumination, the Illuminatus meta-trait could also include either Magery or Power Investiture. The GM could even decide that Illumination is required to perform magic, because only an Illuminatus is attuned to the forces of universe (for Magery) or has a direct link to the divine (Power Investiture). This would be particularly befitting in a modern conspiracy world where only the Secret Masters of the Conspiracy are expected to wield the occult with any ability.

Other advantages could be applied to the meta-trait. Various forms of Empathy (Animal Empathy, Spirit Empathy,

etc.) could demonstrate how enlightened individuals have become sensitive to those around them, "one with everything," while True Faith would be a good choice if the Illuminati are divinely inspired and Doesn't Eat or Drink, Doesn't Sleep, Regeneration, Resistant, and/or Unaging could be used for Illuminati who have perfected their bodies along with their minds. In a very different setting, advantages such as Daredevil, Enhanced Move, and Super Jump traits could be granted to all Illuminated for a cinematic style involving battles between the secret masters (such as in the manga *X*).

Disadvantages as well as advantages can be part of the Illuminatus meta-trait. The most obvious disadvantages are alterations of the mind, for it is a common theme that the Illumination bends and even breaks the sanity of those who experience it. Such mental disadvantages as Delusions, Lunacy, Nightmares, and Phantom Voices are the most obvious, though others could certainly be used. In many settings, particularly Horror ones, the Illuminati may no longer be entirely human, and disadvantages such as Disturbing Voice, Divine Cruse, Frightens Animals, and Unnatural or Supernatural Features could demonstrate how an Illuminatus has gone beyond the pale.

Epilepsy deserves special notice in regard to Illuminated disadvantages. As its entry states, epileptic fits have often been associated with the presence of gods and other spirits, who are either communicating with or possessing the subject in question. Even if the fit is not the direct result of such a presence, it could still be caused by the Illuminatus' connection to the mystic world and therefore a product of his Illumination. In some settings, it may be the only way for a character to receive this disadvantage.

In many worlds, the mere fact of being an Illuminated has social ramifications for the character. Depending upon how the Illuminati are regarded, this may result in Reputation and Status (positive or negative), advantages such as Legal Immunity or Social Regard, or disadvantages like Enemy or Social Stigma.

The Gate to Power

Another way to treat the special abilities of the Illuminati is to have the meta-trait grant access to advantages that they could not normally possess, functioning in a similar manner to an Unusual Background.

Any of the advantages mentioned in the previous section are logical possibilities, as are all advantages normal classified as "psionics" (enlightened often unlocks the potential of the mind). Another interesting prospect, especially for GMs who want to give their secret masters a more cinematic feel, is to allow them to learn skills that normally require the Trained By A Master advantage, such Flying Leap and Invisibility Art.

Illuminati could also be used as a gateway to more outlandish advantages. After all, Moses parted the Red Sea and unleashed plagues upon Egypt, the Rosicrucians were rumored to turn invisible and change their shape, and the Tantric siddhar are said to grow, shrink, and walk on air. Even superhumanly high attributes might be acceptable (particularly IQ), as the Illuminati are not bound by human weakness.

Disadvantages could also be gained in this way. For example, some Illuminati might develop Unnatural Feature of "pure yellow eyes," while others Frighten Animals with their strange auras and scent. Each paying in their own way for the power that crackles through them.

As with Unusual Background, the cost of making Illuminated a "gateway advantage" is up to the Game Master, and depends how many advantages and disadvantages it grants access to, and how much the GM wishes to limit them.

The Secret Techniques of the Secret Masters

In a world that includes competing Illuminated groups, an intriguing option would be for each group to receive different supernatural traits. So one secret society might control minds, while another walks through walls. As a series of examples, suggested advantages and disadvantages for the major Illuminated groups from *Illuminati: New World Order* are listed below, as well as the ways their Blessed members would attempt receive visions and the sort of visions that they would likely receive.

Adepts of Hermes

These arcane scholars are dedicated to expanding their minds and improving their occult powers to the exclusion of all else. Magery is almost certainly tied to their Illuminated powers, as is enhanced IQ and probably various forms of supernatural insight (particularly Oracle). However, they are liable to fall to any manner of insanities, as well as suffer under strange supernatural disadvantages produced by their contact with raw mana and their links with dark occult powers.

Their visions are achieved through the mantic arts (i.e. divination), particularly astrology, crystal-gazing, and numerology. The being they contact is their god and founder: Hermes Trismegistos, the lord of magic. He who is known to the Egyptians as Tahuti (Thoth), to the Romans as Mercury, and to the Scandinavians as Odin. The being who the Servants of Cthulhu claim is actually Nyarlathotep, the Crawling Chaos.

Bavarian Illuminati

The sages of hidden authority and subtle power, they, above all of the other Illuminated orders, are masters of controlling from behind the scenes. Their members are often experts in telepathy, allowing them to read and control minds while being able to quickly send secret messages to their underlings and associates. They also favor Invisibility and Shapeshifting and put them to much more varied uses than the Society of Assassins does. These people are the true "Invisible Ones," rarely seen, but always felt.

Even in death their Secret Chiefs still guide the subordinates, particularly through dreams (though certain Bavarians prefer to instead meditate on the pyramid emblazoned on the American one-dollar bill). The ascended spirits of Adam Weishaupt and the other Masters deliver commands and information, always reminding their agents to "listen and obey."

Bermuda Triangle

As their illuminated order seeks variety above all else, the "Boys from Bermuda" are often "jacks-of-all-trade and masters of none," experimenting with different kinds of power, but not specializing in any.

However, a solid minority focuses their power on the sea, gaining such advantages as Amphibious and Doesn't Breathe (Gills) and listening to the voices of the waves . . .

Discordian Society

Firm believers in "doing your own thing," each Chaote is expected to embrace the powers that most suit him or her, as long as they also further confusion and chaos. Psionic mind-control, weird transformations, and badass super kung-fu are all dandy as long as it makes the world that much more interesting. Most Discordians start off crazy, and go downhill from there, often eventually warping their bodies along with their minds.

They are the polar opposite of the Adepts in regard to methods of mystic insight. Instead of employing ancient and respected divinations, each Chaote has his or her own idiosyncratic technique, such as studying the patterns of snails, dancing until an ecstatic frenzy is reached, or even gazing at the images formed in a bubble bath. Whatever method used, the end result is touching minds with the great goddess Eris, queen of strife in one of her infinite incarnations. Her pronouncements are often garbled, convoluted, and even contradictory, but the Chaote would do best to follow them to the letter. Or not. Who knows? All hail Discordia.

Gnomes of Zurich

The most materialistic of the Illuminati, the Gnomes are least likely to gain supernatural powers through their Illumination. However, they often develop strange Affinities and Talents for money and its production, sometimes

even gaining unnatural control over the gold. If they don't start with Greed and Miserliness, they soon acquire the disadvantages, and they sometimes even become saddled with Dependencies or other supernatural disadvantages connected with their wealth.

Their treasure is almost always the medium used to receive visions and omens, they study their reflections in gems as a form of crystal-gazing, watch the light reflect off falling coins, or simply lie on their money and listening to it "talk." Some Gnomes believe they commune with the spirits of departed billionaires, the "genius loci" of their hoard, or archetypal gods of plenty (which their enemies often identify with Mammon, demon prince of greed).

Network

Virtually all of the powers that members of the Network gain through Illumination are geared towards understanding, mastering, and advancing cyberspace. Examples include various Cybernetics (perhaps the process of Network Illumination transforms parts of the body into machinery), Mind Reading (cybernetic), and even Digital Mind ("welcome to the new you"). The downside of these advantages is often poor Illuminati lose contact with the world outside the Internet, and even with their humanity. Some of the leaders of the Network are sentient computers. Were these computers once human?

They achieve their visions by jacking into the Net and either gazing at the shifting tapestry of information or listening to the whispers of the spirits that ride the Information Highway (possibly even that dark god Shub-Internet).

Servants of Cthulhu

Any supernatural advantages granted by the Great Old Ones and the Outer Gods to their minions are quick paths to insanity. In extreme situations, even the body is twisted, eventually resulting in the cultist in question being transformed beyond recognition, such as devolving into protean goo or becoming the member of an appropriate servitor race such as a deep one or a rat-thing.

A Servant receives visions directly from Great Old Ones or from Nyarlathotep, who serves as the herald of the Outer Gods. The vision is usually a combination of bizarre images and strange mutterings, things that no mortal mind was meant to perceive, and which merits a fright check. In order to receive this vision, the cultist will usually chant in some ancient, blasphemous tongue. Ia! Ia! Azathoth, Ia!

Shangri-La

Walking paradoxes, these mystics claim to be pacifists and yet are often masters of a wide variety of martial arts. They will usually either have Trained By A Master as part of their Illumination, or be allowed access to chi skills without it. They also favor psionics of all sorts (except those that cause direct harm).

As believers in simplicity and the powers of the mind, disciples of Shangri-La will usually restrain from rituals or paraphernalia more complex mantras and mandalas when they receive their visions. Through focused meditation, they orient themselves with the universe or commune with bodhisattvas.

Society of Assassins

In opposition to the generalities of the Bermuda Triangle, the Society of Assassins is extremely focused. It does one thing, but it does one thing very well. It is an organization of killers, plain and simple, and their powers are geared towards murder, helping them to track, infiltrate, assassinate, and leave. Invisibility, Shapeshifting, and various forms of Detect are particularly valued.

Though it is commonly believed that this order's drug of choice is hashish, others have suggested that it is instead a strange hallucinogenic known as "black alamut." If the later is true, than virtually all of the visions of the Assassins comes from taking the drug and then perceiving the Garden of Paradise (which they believe they will dwell in forever

if they serve the Society well). In the Garden, they are spoken to by the spirit of their founder, Hasan ibn al-Sabah, who still continues to guide the society into the new millennium.

UFOs

If the Flying Saucer People have Illuminated humans, these people would be privy to all sorts of alien secrets and technology. They have special parts of their brains unlocked as part of the aliens' experiments in evolving humanity towards "perfection." Some "lucky few" might even be transformed into members of their patrons' species in order for the UFOs to gain a "human insight" into the workings of Earth.

Any Illuminated messages granted to them would likely be beamed directly from the UFOs to the agents' special implants and genetically altered brains. This information would be short and to the point, but as it is produced by extraterrestrial mind would involve a certain amount of deciphering.

What Illuminated powers do the true aliens receive? Fnord.

Illuminatus Meta-Trait

35 points

This is an example of a generic Illuminatus meta-trait which will hopefully inspire GMs to produce their own variations. This Illuminatus possesses various forms of mystic insight and finds the universe accommodating to his needs. Furthermore, by virtue of his evolved state of consciousness, he is able to gain access to powers of the mind and body which are out of the reach of normal people. However these powers are not without a price, and his sensitive mental state often causes the character to fall into epileptic fits during times of stress.

The meta-trait includes Blessed [10], Illuminated [15], Intuition [15], Serendipity 1 [15], and Epilepsy [-30]. Furthermore, it may be used instead of Trained By A Master as a prerequisite for skills that involve the focus of chi (Flying Leap, Invisibility Art, Power Blow, etc.), and allows characters to learn new psi powers with earned character points [10].

The most obvious ways to enhance this meta-trait is to take Very Blessed and further levels of Serendipity. Consult the earlier section of the article for other ideas. An individual with this meta-trait will probably be part of an Illuminated order or be a "rogue," either choice will probably grant a further package of traits.

Pyramid Review

vs. Monsters Deluxe Edition

Published by [Ronin Arts](#)

vs. Monsters

Written by Philip Reed

88-page A5 Perfect Bound Black & White Book; \$15

1.8 MB 41-page PDF; \$7.00

vs. Monsters Addition

Written by Michael Hammes

48-page A5 Perfect Bound Black & White Book; \$10

648 KB 20-page PDF; \$5.00

vs. Monsters is not a new game, per se. Written by Philip Reed, well-known as the designer of *Frag* for Steve Jackson Games and of his own creations such as [The Book of Unusual Treasures](#) and [Motocaust](#), the game first appeared in April 2003 in PDF format. Originally it was an entry at www.24hourrpg.com, the idea being to take a game from the conception stage through design and development to layout and presentation in exactly 24 hours. **vs. Monsters** saw further development in 2004, being released as a PDF RPG, and finally this year as a series of books through the usual distribution channels.

Although still available as a PDF, **vs. Monsters** comes as a small white book, whose internal layout marked in heavy, sometimes oppressive swathes of black. This is actually effective, as is the use of white text on the black, and it certainly suits the game's setting. So does the artwork, which is all taken from the public domain, and either hints at the medievalism of its horror, or the romantic longings of its period. This is the late 19th century, for **vs. Monsters** falls into the Gothic genre, similar to titles such as [My life With Master, Gloom -- The Game of Inauspicious Incidents & Grave Consequences](#), and [Don't Walk in Winter Woods: A Game of Folkloric Fear](#). Its influences are the works of Lewis Carroll, Tim Burton, and Neil Gaiman.

More specifically, **vs. Monsters** is set in semi-mythic East Coast America. Drawn from pinches of this, and dashes of that, its locations are archetypal beginning with the Town. It is full of thieves and murderers, its main streets lit by electricity off which wend a maze of dark and twisting alleyways, the byways for the Town's ne'er-do-wells and worse. A single Road leads from the Town across the Plains and through the fearful Forest to the near impassable Mountains, while a single dusty Track takes you to a singularly unwelcoming Village. On the Plain stands a Church, a forlorn but perhaps hopeful refuge from the lurking threats. These are the monsters, some known, others not, that the player characters might face -- from Apparitions and Cthulhoid Terrors to the Spectral Locomotive and The Misters. The characters are acquaintances or companions, perhaps all tenants at the same boarding house.

Mechanically, **vs. Monsters** uses cards rather than dice to resolve its situations. An ordinary deck can be employed for this, though a **vs. Monsters** deck can be downloaded and used instead. Such a deck appeared in the very limited White Box Edition of the game. To undertake an action, a player or GM draws a number of cards equal to the appropriate

attribute. If the highest value of the cards drawn is equal to or greater than the action's Target Number, then it is successful. Combat is equally as simple, with initiative merely working in seating order around the table. Damage is more complex, a player drawing cards to get a value lower than the damage cap of his character's weapon. The Target Numbers run from four (easy) and six (average) through 10 (hard) and King (very hard), to Ace (impossible).

Characters possess four attributes: Fighting, Defending, Thinking, and Running, to which are assigned the values 6, 4, 3, and 3. A three-word description is placed under the label "Blah," and a player lists his character's Stuff. This is his advantages (such as Attractive, Good in a Fight, and Sharp Eyed) and disadvantages (such as Hunted, Minority, and Restless Nights), of which he has two each. All characters have a Health of 10, and list any other extraneous non-mechanical details such as appearance and background under "Fluff." Equipment acquisition works differently, not using money, but involves each player drawing cards to equal or beat the listed value of the desired items. Thus a common shirt or 49 feet of rope have a value of two, while a revolver or an old horse has a value of four. A player continues drawing for equipment until he has everything or the card drawn is too low, and he can draw no more.

This being a horror game, it has the mandatory method of handling scares. A player draws cards equal to the value of his Thinking score, with the Target Number being equal to a monster's combined Fighting and Defending scores, or set by the GM. For Giant Vermin (bats, rats, spiders, and so on) the Target Number is four, or nine for skeletons and zombies, and an impossible 14 for vampires! Only one deck is used for **vs. Monsters** and only the GM can shuffle it, though players can receive and retain cards as a reward for good play. Such cards can be used later instead of drawing cards.

vs. Monsters contains little in the way of GM advice, but this is not a serious problem. The game is not intended for the inexperienced anyway, but should such advice be needed, it just directs you to Kenneth Hite's superlative [*Nightmares of Mine*](#). Several adventure ideas are provided, but other sources can easily be plundered, for example, *Ravenloft* or *Chill*.

In some ways, the meat of **vs. Monsters** is in its threats and monsters. The majority are what you would expect -- the zombie, the scarecrow, the evil cultist and so on. But The Misters are something special. Inspired by Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and the Strangers of *Dark City*, each Mister is immaculate, dapper, and well turned out, yet resides in the dark recesses of the Town. Something is not quite right with them, as they all look similar and disturb subtly. Each possesses a strange ability like Dominance or Pyrokinetic Jet, and is identified by formal, yet creepy titles like Mister Quiver, Mister Bustle, or Mister Squeeze. Although highly reminiscent of the Gentlemen from the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode *Hush*, a quote from *Dark City* points to the Misters' greater influence.

The film's influence upon **vs. Monsters** assumes greater importance once you realize that the insubstantial nature of the game is not a fault. The brevity of the design process, hardly a fault in a 24-hour RPG, explains much of its superficiality. The point is that the world of **vs. Monsters** is not meant to be an actual place, but an almost mythic place built of archetypes. And like the metropolis of the film, the world of **vs. Monsters** also has an inescapable boundary, in this case the Mountains. The sketchiness also lends the game a timelessness that only enhances the mythic, but still familiar feel of the late 19th century.

For those wanting more substance, Michael Hammes' **vs. Monsters Addition** provides more locations, including the Morgue and the Train Station; more detailed ready-to-play NPCs and Contacts; extra Bad, but no Good stuff; and of course, more Monsters. The latter stretches **vs. Monsters'** genre, including threats such as a Crop Duster (a biplane naturally) and a Robot. It also adds a few new rules and more equipment.

A second supplement goes beyond the setting of these two books. With **vs. Monsters Anthology**, Phil Reed lets six other authors explore the milieu of **vs. Monsters**. Jonathon Walton's "Foreign Devils" is shamefully Orientalist with the players as late 19th-century Chinese gangsters hunting monsters using swords, knives, and Buddhist prayer-bead-firing muskets. It introduces the concept of gun-fu and stunts to **vs. Monsters** and feels very [*Feng Shui*](#)-like. With "The Mirror People," Kirk A. Dankmyer gives a more detailed monster suited to a longer game, whilst Justin D. Jacobson draws on his own *Poisoncraft: The Dark Art* to provide more detailed rules for poison in a "Posioncraft Addendum." "The Tower" by Keith Taylor is the game's first fully developed adventure and contains built-in replay value. Ethan Greer's piece is quite literally called "Untitled," exploring two locations in greater depth and suggesting how **vs.**

Monsters might be run. Finally, Mark O'Bannon's "vs. Monsters Imperium Monsters" adds several fantasy creatures.

As an exercise in RPG creation, **vs. Monsters** is certainly an achievement, managing to feel rounded and playable despite relatively little development time. Its innate sketchiness works in its favor, leaving plenty of room for the GM to develop the setting to his own ends as well as adding elements that occur during play. It also marks the game as one suited to the experienced GM who will be able to work the mythic medievalism and romance of this game to great effect. **vs. Monsters** is certainly far from flashy, but it quietly achieves a moody evocation of a familiar era, full of lurking fears.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Fettnapf . . . in Sicht

Published by [Amigo](#)

Designed by Reinhard Staupe

96 cards (21 green, 17 red, 58 blue) & rule sheet; full color, boxed; two to five players; \$8.95

Most everyone has probably played a memory game with a standard card deck at one point or another . . . lay them all face-down and take turns flipping them over by twos to see who collects the most successfully matched pairs. There aren't a lot of specialized memory games out there, and fewer still that make really good use of it as a game mechanic. That's part of what makes ***Fettnapf . . . in Sicht*** so intriguing, that "Why didn't someone else do this?" vibe, and why it's so easy to forgive them for one of the bizarrest and inscrutable themes ever.

The object of the game is to have the fewest fettnapf cards when one of the other players hits the critical, game-ending mass of four fettnapf.

Everyone gets a hand of blue cards, with numbers from zero to nine. These are played into a common pool, and every time you add a card, that number is added to the current total. If you put a two in when it's already up to 12, the game total is now a 14. This continues until you reach 30; at that point, cards played into the pool start subtracting, until the total is back down to 10. The numbers continue to rebound up and down like this throughout the game.

Everyone also has a green number card, kept semi-secret from the other players. You show your card at the start of the game, and everyone has to remember everyone else's number. These are the numbers you want to avoid. If someone has 17, for example, you don't want to be the one to bring the game's total up to 17 (this makes those zero cards pretty important). If you do step on someone's numerical toes in this fashion, you have to take a red fettnapf card and they get to take another number card. They show it to the other players for memorization, and play continues. When someone gets their fourth fettnapf card, the game ends and the player with the fewest such cards wins.

The cards are decorated with strange little "fat cell" faces, and they're everything you need to shuffle, to play, and to stomp up and down on in frustration. They're colorful, too. It would have been nice to have some sort of visual cue that tells the group in which direction the total is going right now. Even a simple card saying "add" on one side and "subtract" on the other would have been handy, though one could make such a thing oneself and its inclusion might have thrown the card printing scheme off.

The winning condition is a bit clunky; since it only takes four cards to end the game, there are going to be a lot of people with the same number of fettnapf cards when the dust settles. When you bring the total to match someone else's green card(s), they get another green card, making them more likely to be the beneficiary of others' mistakes, so the skew isn't as bad as it could be. Then again, it's also somewhat a vicious cycle that tilts things increasingly in that player's favor. With only five players involved, you might think that's enough for a good spread, but all too often it's not, and two or more people tied for the win share the win. There are no tie breakers, and given that the number of these cards determines not only the winner but the game's end, for the loser their failure is usually telegraphed to them well in advance.

Fettnapf . . . in Sicht is a delightful if somewhat elusive little game suitable for the whole family - if you like hearing your family say "Arrgh" a lot, and "But I thought you had the 18 card" (followed again by "Arrgh"). (And yes, the game's title means "fat cup in view" -- you're sort of playing map cards and fat cells into an imaginary cup in the middle, and when you blow it you've "stepped in it." Or something. Go figure.)

In addition to making your little gray cells sing for their supper, Essen's clever card game carries equal, healthful doses of infuriation and tension . . . tension often missing even from pricey war games. Like so many Out of the Box products, the rules are the sort of thing that make you wonder why we haven't been playing something like this all along. Stepping around the increasingly populated numerical minefield is a chancey little dance, playable in just a few hair-tearing minutes, and it's the sort of thing that keeps players saying, "Okay, one more game . . . and this time I won't step in it."

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Warhammer Armies: Wood Elves (for Warhammer Fantasy Battle)

Published by [Games Workshop](#)

Written by Anthony Reynolds and Matthew Ward

Illustrated by John Blanche, Alex Boyd, Paul Dainton, David Gallagher, Paul Jeacock, Nuala Kinrade and Karl Kopinski

Cover by Paul Dainton

80-page b&w softcover with color plates; \$20.00

The latest army book for [Warhammer Fantasy Battle's sixth edition](#) — and probably the last book before the inevitable seventh edition — deals with the Wood Elves at long last. Fans of this army have been waiting a long time for a supplement dealing with the Elves of the Everwood. Will it live up to their expectations?

The Wood Elves are essentially the same magically adept expert archers and forest-lovers of every fantasy setting, but with a dark **Warhammer** twist. They leave the forest in Wild Hunts, killing those they cross for sport, steal away human children to be their unaging slaves, and ally themselves with capricious fairies called Spites who are as likely to go for your eyeballs with knives as they are to steal your milk.

Separated from the High Elves after their war with the Dwarfs, the Wood Elves chose to remain in the haunted and sentient forest of Athel Loren rather than retreat over the sea (brief mention is made of other Wood Elves in the Old World, though they are not described). Renaming themselves the Asrai, they divided into kinbands and settled different areas of the forest, forming pacts with the spirits who lived there. For the past 4,000 years they have lived in Athel Loren, trying their best to stay out of the politics and wars of the greater world around them, with varying degrees of success.

The fluff portion of the book deals with the history and personality of the Asrai, which is largely unchanged from earlier editions, although noticeably grimmer in tone. The main change in terms of background is the addition of the Spites. Fairies have been hinted at in earlier books, but never fully described. They are an atmospheric addition to the setting, mixing mischief with malice. The excellent artwork shows them as the Jim Henson creatures of *Labyrinth* if remade by Tim Burton.

The Wood Elves have always been an excellent army for those who prefer attacking at range. Many units have no rank bonus or much in the way of hand-to-hand skills, but Elven Ballistic Skill is always high, and even wizards and cavalry carry longbows. Wood Elves no longer suffer a penalty for moving and shooting, a nice rule that encourages maneuvering over sitting still and firing away. The Glade Guard unit's bows are higher Strength at close range, giving a good reason to maneuver them up close and back off out of charge range, a risky tactic that would be fun to play around with.

Not all units are weak and shooty, though. The Treemen in particular are absolute powerhouses of destruction. The Wardancers (formerly punk-looking, now more Celtic in appearance) are capable of defeating units several times their size. Elven characters, though low in Toughness, can be beefed up by giving them Spites, who are treated as magic items with variable effects. Some can turn weapons magical, others have ranged attacks or fly at opponents attempting to sever their arteries with tiny blades. Mounts like Forest Dragons and Unicorns can also be used to impressive effect.

The forest spirit portion of the army cause fear or terror effects, and canny use of Spites and magic items can add to that. As anyone who plays with one of the Undead armies knows, effective use of the psychology rules can potentially win a game for you before a single blow is struck.

The Wood Elves have a significant weakness in their price. Most opponents will outnumber a typical army, as even the cheapest Wood Elf troop costs 12 points. Even at that price Dryads are a bargain, with two attacks at Weapon Skill four and Strength four and causing fear. Their Hero choice, the Branchwraith, does seem overpriced at 65 points however, especially compared to Tree Kin.

Reports from players suggest the list is balanced, or at least no more unbalanced than is normal for a Warhammer army. It's difficult to judge the fairness of points values when some of the Asrai's special abilities benefit from having lots of forest terrain, which will differ widely from table to table. If you plan to collect Wood Elves, start modeling trees now.

Aside from players of the wargame, there is potential value for roleplayers here, especially players of **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay**. Those who play Elves will find ways to make their characters more alien and in-step with a grim setting; sidebars describing various kinbands Wood Elves can belong to are especially useful. Gamemasters get a roughly mapped-out haunted forest that regularly Rip-Van-Winkles people as well as new creatures like the Great Stag, Tree Kin, and Spites, although work will be required for Spites as they aren't given statistics.

Overall, it's a fun and fair addition to the game. The only problem is justifying the cash spent when we don't know how long before the new edition renders it out-of-date . . . but if money was an issue you probably wouldn't be playing something as expensive as **Warhammer Fantasy Battle**, would you?

--Jody Macgregor

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Paychecks, Door Locks, and Mashed Potatoes

Item 1:

While digging through my flat-tree archives a few weeks back, I discovered a fanfic *Star Trek: The Next Generation* story I wrote a decade or so ago. (Of course, this was written back before I even knew what fanfic was, back when I had visions of becoming discovered as a brilliant *Star Trek* writer . . . heck, back when there were fewer than half the number of Trek franchises that there are now.) My wife read said story and seemed to like it. Of course, she's obliged to say stuff like that; the crushing of adolescent dreams is reserved for the third anniversary or so.

Anyway, one criticism she had about the story was that, at one point, it refers to the crew of the *Enterprise* getting their paychecks. "I thought they didn't get paid," she said.

"Welllll, they've said that now. But at the time I wrote it I don't think they'd mentioned that fact. Besides, they seem to understand what money is; they talk about going shopping, they know what gold-pressed latinum is, they have card games with poker chips; they've got to be gambling for *something*."

We argued the point back and forth a bit, and I reached an interesting conclusion (which may or may not be correct, and which I'm holding off from saying until I build suspense through a few more paragraphs).

Item 2:

This past week, I spent over two hours using our household's new shredder to destroy a bag's worth of documents that have been accumulating for the past few months. Actually, the new strip-cut shredder was designed to augment our effective-but-slower cross-cut shredder. I divided documents into two broad categories:

- things that would be a pain if they were found by evildoers, but wouldn't cause too much harm (credit card applications; checks to expired bank accounts; any paper application that, if presented as a series of taped-together quarter-inch strips, would hopefully be rejected)
- things that could be used by evildoers to muck up my life (credit card receipts, bank statements, a copy of some insignificant plans I recovered after killing a senator's daughter and her two robots)

Anyway, after I got done with the project, as I was throwing away sacks of long-form confetti, I found myself thinking: "How much of our lives is devoted solely to keeping jerks from wrecking our lives?"

Extrapolating that point, I found myself wondering what a society would look like where it *wasn't* necessary to do all that junk. And there were two possibilities I thought of . . . possibilities I'll reveal in two more mysterious paragraphs.

Item 3:

While I was pulling an all-nighter last week, I found myself re-watching the first season of *C.S.I.* In one of my favorite moments of the first series, the main character Grissom (a lapsed Catholic) finds himself having a philosophical conversation with a priest. And they have the following exchange:

GRISSOM: A hundred years ago we didn't have the technology for fingerprints. Fifteen years ago, we didn't have DNA. Hopefully one day, we'll have foolproof means by which to put the right man in jail . . .

PRIEST: Someday, we won't need jails.

That conversation leads directly to Item 2:

The two possible futures I envisioned of a shredless future were:

- We either have no need to take precautions against wrongdoers, because the ability of wrongdoers to do wrong has been eradicated, or
- We eradicate evildoing itself.

The difference, of course, is the difference between having a door lock that could never be picked, kicked, or destroyed, and not having a need to lock your door at all. (This gulf in lock philosophy is apparently most notable in comparing the front doors of United States houses with those in Canada.)

Now, the former philosophy is pretty easy to envision: It's like what we do now for security, only more so. The latter philosophy is harder to visualize, and requires some more consideration.

Which leads back to my first point: visualizing a money-less *Star Trek* universe. Eventually I posited that there *was* money, but it wasn't in a way that we could envision. (I'll be returning to that point momentarily.) I imagine the root needs of money -- shelter, food, health care, temperature control -- are largely fulfilled in the future. With replication technology and near-limitless energy, most needs would be taken care of. So, too, I imagine most *wants* are taken care of; if you want a couch, a hat, or a steak dinner, they're easy enough to replicate.

So what would money be used for in *Star Trek*, then? Namely, things that *can't* be replicated. If you're a *Trek* fan, note that just about every object of barter or purchase is unique or impossible to replicate: contraband such as Romulan Ale; ancient artifacts such as reading glasses; trinkets, clothing, or tapestries unique to a planet.

A person transplanted from the worst of Victorian England to the modern U.K. might find themselves marveling at the social progress and asking, "Are there free funerals for the orphans who freeze in the street?" This would be a difficult answer for a modern person to answer; there aren't free funerals for frozen orphans, because there really aren't many orphans freezing in the streets anymore.

In the same way, it's possible to envision a world where someone could say, "We don't receive pay" and be meaning it in the sense of "we don't get compensation upon which we depend for our present or future life or happiness." Do we get a check? Sure, but not in the way that you'd envision it.

Taking it to a logical extreme, consider the answer to the question: "Are there mashed potatoes in heaven?" Many definitions of heaven -- a place of infinite love, a place of eternal peace and happiness, a place where wishes come true -- can be reconciled with the idea of "mashed potatoes in heaven." After all, if heaven is a place of eternal happiness, and mashed potatoes give you a finite amount of happiness, then heaven must contain the same type and intensity of happiness as bestowed by mashed potatoes. Of course, it's a stretch to go from that to envisioning *Close Encounter*-esque mounds of potatoes glopped around outside the pearly gates. But it all has to do with how you frame it mentally. (And, of course, if you don't believe in heaven, then it's entirely accurate to say, "There are all the mashed potatoes you'd ever want or need in heaven.")

I'll try to pick up this torch again next week, but for the time being consider that envisioning and describing alternate realities -- past, present, or future -- can often stem not from knowing the answers, but asking the right questions.

--Steven Marsh

Kenilworth for Gamers

by Jennifer W. Spirko

Saxons built it, Danes destroyed it, and Normans rebuilt it. The remnants of Simon de Montfort's followers holed up in it at the end of the Baron's War. Edward II was imprisoned there, Henry V vacationed there, and the Earl of Leicester staged an elaborate marriage proposal there. Finally, Cromwell's men destroyed it. What ghosts still haunt the magnificent red ruins of Kenilworth Castle?

Kenilworth offers gamers a millennium's worth of opportunities, from historical intrigues to modern-day ghost adventures.

Walk-Through

The castle lies in the town named for it, in Warwickshire, about 95 miles northwest of London and five miles north of Warwick. It is open to the public, and occasionally hosts medieval re-enactors and other special events. It is surrounded by gently rolling meadow which, for most of the castle's history, was the Mere, a shallow lake created by damming local streams; at over a mile long, it was the largest artificial lake in England. The Mere once stretched around two sides of the castle walls and was channeled into a moat on the others. The causeway that once spanned the water survives, entering the grounds from the modern parking lot, which was formerly the Brays, or tiltyard. Once inside the walls, the most obvious structure is Leicester's Building, a four-story tower constructed in the 16th century by Robert Dudley, where he played host to Elizabeth I and other important guests (see below, "Snapshot: The Man Who Would be King"). The huge, many-paned windows would have given a view of the Mere. To the right are the preserved Tudor stables and Dudley's luxurious Gatehouse, also intact.

The castle's oldest surviving structure is "Caesar's Tower," the Norman keep, located near the gatehouse. (It was common for the principal keep of a castle to be named for Julius Caesar, perhaps following the tradition of the Tower of London, which was credited -- anachronistically -- to him.) It remains imposing and warlike, with its 20-foot-thick walls and distinctively square late-Norman style. (The windows we see today were added much later, when the keep was no longer of such pressing military importance.) Alongside the keep are reconstructed Tudor gardens in the "knot" style. The tower gives a commanding view of the surrounding countryside, mostly rolling farmland today, dotted by forest; when it was constructed, the area was more fully wooded.

The third large structure of the main castle is the great Gothic hall built by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. In fact, John turned the castle into a genuine showplace, rebuilding the entire structure, save only the original "Caesar's Tower." Now roofless (and, to some extent, wall-less) the Great Hall remains remarkable, and many of the delicate Gothic window frames are intact. The hall's upper level would have been two high stories tall, lined with large windows and narrow buttresses.

Gaming Opportunities

Kenilworth can provide a setting for gaming in just about any era since Norman times; some particularly interesting episodes are detailed below in a series of "Snapshots" providing historical background and adventure seeds. Useful resources will be ***GURPS Middle Ages***, ***GURPS Who's Who*** (especially volume 1), ***GURPS Time Travel***, and ***GURPS Swashbuckling***, along with any genre books that fit the campaign. Those genre resources that fit most readily with the "Snapshots" below include ***GURPS Horror***, ***GURPS Magic***, and ***GURPS Spirits***. Information on siege engines and weaponry can be found in ***GURPS Low Tech***.

Brief History

Intrigues and battles cluster around the great castles for various reasons, not least of which is their symbolic and strategic importance. Kenilworth has been involved in more than its share of plots, probably because -- instead of being held for long by one family -- it was a royal holding off and on, given as a gift to favored nobles, and periodically returned to the crown. The circumstances of all those changes of hands make for a vibrant and tumultuous history.

There was a castle here as early as late-Saxon times, although legend links an even earlier one to King Arthur. The "modern" castle, however, was begun in the 12th century by the Norman Geoffrey de Clinton. He was apparently a remarkable man; although of lowly birth, he impressed King Henry I so much that he received not only the scenic estate at Kenilworth, but also such lofty titles as Lord Chamberlain, Royal Treasurer, and Justice of England. The newly built castle was so impressive that the Clintons wisely gifted it back to the royal family. Kenilworth later became one of the most sought-after estates in England. It was also one of five licensed tournament-grounds; among the famous jousts hosted here was the Round Table of Knights in 1279, in which a hundred knights participated.

King John admired Kenilworth so much so that he spent the then-remarkable sum of just over £1,115 extending and refurbishing the castle in the early 13th century. It was among the four most expensive of a great series of castle constructions and rebuildings that John embarked on during his reign. Those expenses became one of the sources of the resentment that built up against him from his over-taxed vassals. The castle-building campaign was on one hand a powerful demonstration of royal Norman authority, but it became, ironically, a spur to the weakening of that authority, as John's fed-up barons forced a series of concessions from the king (including the Magna Carta, in 1215).

The next few chapters in Kenilworth's history put it at the center of national politics, as detailed below (see "Snapshot: The Barons' War"). Later on, by the end of the 14th century, the castle and its lands were attached to the powerful Dukedom of Lancaster, which during the tenure of John of Gaunt became one of the premier titles in England. John extended and improved the castle, and his nephew Henry Bolingbroke extended and improved on the family fortunes by deposing King Richard II and becoming King Henry IV. His son Henry V was yet another fan of Kenilworth; he had a fox-harbor built there for hunting, and a pleasure-house built on a low island in the Mere, which he called Le Plesant Maris ("the pleasant marsh"). Shakespeare buffs might take note that it was apparently here, during Henry's Lent vacation in the early 15th century, that the Dauphin of France had his insulting gift of tennis balls delivered, an incident immortalized in the play Henry V. Did the king sit in the fabulous hall commissioned by his great-uncle, John of Gaunt, while the infamous toys bounced around the now-ruined floor, setting in motion the military campaign that would culminate in the Battle of Agincourt?

Kenilworth next makes its appearance on the forefront of English history during the reign of Elizabeth I, when she gave the holding to her controversial favorite Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester (see below, "Snapshot: The Man Who Would be King"). But the castle returned once again to the crown when James I's son Prince Henry arranged with Dudley's exiled son to "buy" Kenilworth for £14,500 and the title of Constable. The prince died with less than a third of the sum paid, and his brother, the future King Charles I, then took possession of Kenilworth, with no further compensation for Dudley. It might have been a harbinger of things to come: Charles was such an unloved, autocratic king that his reign sparked the English Revolution. He was eventually executed for crimes against the nation.

After the demise of its last royal landlord, the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell took possession of Kenilworth and gave the estate to some of his officers. Apparently unimpressed with Kenilworth's evocative architecture and obviously hostile to its royal heritage, they carried off the valuables, demolished many of the buildings, drained the lake, and divided the grounds up into individual family farms. The land was reunited into a single estate after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, and given to Sir Edward Hyde, named Baron Kenilworth and Earl of Clarendon. After all the excitement of its past, Kenilworth finally embarked upon a quiet retirement; it remained a holding of the Earls of Clarendon until donated to the government in 1937. It is still a public property today, operated by English Heritage.

Snapshot: The Baron's War, 1265-66

For over seven years, England was divided, between those who follow Simon de Montfort, the powerful and charismatic Earl of Leicester, and those who support Prince Edward, the equally powerful and charismatic heir to King Henry III. It was Edward who, escaping from de Montfort, raised the royal standard on the Welsh Marches, and who

led the loyalist forces to bottle up de Montfort at Evesham, August 4, 1265. The war had begun over the barons' demands that they have a share in governing the realm, which is these days seen increasingly as a unified nation rather than a collection of feudal manors.

De Montfort's son, also named Simon, fled to his family's castle at Kenilworth, along with a number of followers, known as the Disinherited because the crown seized their lands as punishment for the rebellion. The numbers of Disinherited and their sympathizers increased steadily. The younger Simon de Montfort's confidence had increased, too, and he began sending out bands of armed men to terrorize loyalists by despoiling their lands, driving off livestock, and holding their vassals for ransom.

In July 1266, Prince Edward besieged Kenilworth. While he marshalled his forces at nearby Warwick, Simon fled to another rebel stronghold on the Isle of Ely, intending to gather forces sufficient to break the siege, but he never returned. Henry de Hastings was left in charge at Kenilworth.

Despite the siege engines (Prince Edward has brought a ballista from London), Kenilworth held out. Even psychological warfare failed: When, early in the siege, the Archbishop of Canterbury approaches the castle and publicly excommunicated all within, the defenders dressed up one of their own in clerical robes and "excommunicate" Edward, King Henry, and the Archbishop!

The mediation efforts of a papal legate, who helped draft the Dictum of Kenilworth, failed, as the defenders spurned the punitive terms of the Dictum on two grounds: they had no hand in drafting the document; and the document was, as they put it, "intolerable." The siege lasted for six months, but the castle never fell to attack . . . succumbing instead to disease and starvation.

Gaming Opportunities

Gamers who wish to take part in political intrigue or outright battle can do so in a Baron's War-Kenilworth campaign. Here are a few suggestions:

- **The Times that Try Men's Souls:** The Baron's War can be seen as an early attempt at representative government. (The elder de Montfort actually alienated some of his noble allies by suggesting that, in addition to the "barons," political voice should also be granted to the artisan, merchant, and peasant classes.) Time travelers from the present day (or from the time-travel-friendly Steampunk era?) decide to bring democracy to Europe ahead of schedule by winning the Baron's War. Turning the tide at Kenilworth just might do the trick . . . Will they bring tommy guns to the defenders? Or just assassinate King Henry with a clever infiltration of the besiegers' camp?
- **Double, Bubble, Toil and Trouble:** The mix around Kenilworth is volatile, what with the fiery personalities and the literal firepower of the besieging army. What if magic is added to the mix? Imagine an alternate-history Medieval campaign in which, for instance, the Archbishop of Canterbury's blessings and curses have very real effects on their targets.

Snapshot: A King's prison, 1326-27

King Edward II, fearing for the growing rebellion of his barons led by his estranged wife and her lover, provisioned Kenilworth as a possible refuge. Tensions began years earlier, over the king's extravagant spending, particularly that lavished on his favorites and lovers. His wife, Isabella, left the country to negotiate a peace treaty with her brother, the king of France, but instead, she plotted to invade England. (She went down in history as the "she-wolf of France.") With her lover (and Tower of London escapee) Roger Mortimer, she landed an army in September, 1326, and the army grew quickly as she marched toward London, joined by many Englishmen disaffected with Edward's rule. One by one, Edward's friends were captured and executed, some after rapid treason trials. Finally, Edward was captured in Wales, in November, and imprisoned in the castle he thought he'd take as a refuge: Kenilworth.

In January 1327, the imprisoned king was forced to abdicate, but Isabella still feared that support could rally around

him and threaten the accession of their son, Edward III, who was only 14 years old. In April, Edward II was moved to a new prison, Berkley Castle, and there he was murdered the following autumn in one of English history's most gruesome crimes -- with a hot poker stabbed into his rectum. History has been somewhat kinder to Edward than his wife was, both because of his brutal demise, and because of his sympathetic treatment in the play about him by Christopher Marlow.

Gaming Opportunities

Again, Kenilworth was at the center of national intrigue, with the added elements of sex, romance, and assassination thrown into the mix. Try these adventure seeds:

- **To Save a King:** The players can try to rescue the weakened and demoralized Edward II, either before his abdication (as part of a bid to renew his reign?) or afterward (maybe to spirit him out of England). Adventurers can stage a daring raid on the great castle itself, or intervene as he is moved, under cover of darkness, to what would be his last home at Berkley Castle.
- **The School of Night:** Marlow, along with others of his Cambridge mates, including Sir Walter Raleigh, were members of a shadowy organization called "the School of Night," whose exact nature remains unknown. At the very least, it was a sort of club for free-thinking individuals in which ideas heretical and atheist were aired; much more is suspected, including alchemical research and black magic. A magical, alternate-history, or Illuminati campaign might use the School of Night as a basis for resurrecting (or going back to rescue) Edward II.
- **The Haunted Castle:** The ghost of Edward II has returned to the castle he thought would be his refuge, and now he/it roams Kenilworth, seeking revenge on those who wrongly took his throne. Denizens of the castle keep turning up, impaled with hot pokers; what can lay Edward's spirit to rest at last? (See also, "Secret History," below.)

Snapshot: The Man Who Would be King, 1575

What's a royal favorite to do, after years of waiting to marry the queen? In the case of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, one stages an elaborate 19-day festival filled with shows, parties, and feasts for the visiting Queen Elizabeth I. The recurring theme was the beauty and power and, sometimes, the fickleness of the queen, as well as the virtues of Dudley, such as claims that he was descended from King Arthur. The climactic masque depicted the allegorical story of Deep Desire, who was transformed into a "prick"ly holly bush (the phallic pun was intentional) after being rejected by the cruelly chaste nymph "Zabeta." Elizabeth got the point, as it were, and she left the festivities a day early; poet George Gascoigne was enjoined to accost the queen as she left and tell her the story of the masque, just to make sure she didn't miss out on any of the not-so-subtle messages.

Dudley, a widower, had tried several times before to tempt Elizabeth into marriage with him, and this time he seems to have been acting not so much out of desperation for her hand as out of exasperation; as her "favorite," he wasn't really free to marry anyone else, either, and several of the entertainments he staged for Elizabeth that summer depicted her (or her allegorical representatives) as benign, all-powerful figures who offered their prostrate and lovelorn subject the possibility of liberty. Elizabeth, as history knows, didn't marry Dudley, but he did eventually remarry -- Lettice Devereux, Countess of Essex, the queen's cousin -- in 1578. Dudley's later life was full of disappointments, from the death of his toddler son to a lackluster military campaign in the Netherlands.

Gaming Opportunities

Elizabethan Kenilworth offers rich opportunities for gaming, during one of English history's most vibrant and volatile times.

- **To Catch a Queen:** More than a honeymoon is at stake; whoever marries Elizabeth I becomes King of England and, de facto, one of the most powerful men in Europe. For her entire reign, complex conspiracies raged about the queen, and various suitors, foreign and native, were proposed. Some of those conspiracies will surely

coalesce around the Kenilworth "entertainments." Will the Spanish ambassador be on hand to try and thwart Dudley's efforts? Will radical Protestant nativists be on hand to try and thwart the Spanish (and any other ambassadors)? It's a soap opera with international implications!

- **To Kill a Queen:** Any number of people were executed during Elizabeth's reign for attempted regicide and/or high treason, such as her royal cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, and the Jesuit convert Edmund Campion. (The Jesuits were perennially suspected of planting such plots.) Kenilworth, with its big crowds and distractions, might be an ideal place to stage an assassination or coup attempt. Players could change the course of history by participating in such an attempt, or preserve it by acting behind the scenes to thwart one.
- **"I can call spirits from the briny deep":** Shakespeare gave that line to the magic-wielding warlord Owain Glendower, but spirits were called from the "briny deep" at Kenilworth, too, in the water-borne masques played out on the lake. What if these impersonations of Jupiter, the nymphs, and other supernatural beings catch the attention of real spirits? What if that is actually the intention? Players could deal with the consequences of real magic erupting into the festivities. (See *GURPS Who's Who 1* for notes on Dr. Dee, Elizabeth I, and William Shakespeare) or *GURPS Spirits* and *GURPS Celtic Myth* for ideas about the nature of spirits that might show up.)

Secret History of Kenilworth

Why do so many residents of Kenilworth come to a bad end? And was it really just loyalty or prudence that made so many of them give the estate back to the crown over and over again? Maybe, just maybe, there's a dark secret buried underneath the castle's ruins, a secret that the Puritans tried to destroy by dismantling the estate itself . . . Enterprising GMs could fill in these sketched "secret history" seeds with their favorite horror and suspense elements for a chilling modern-day or historical campaign set amid a Kenilworth that houses something far more sinister than the memory of bloody times and dark conspiracies.

- **The Ancient Roots:** The present-day castle was built, nearly a thousand years ago, on an ancient holy site, one which had housed sacred strongholds in pre-Roman times. Sensing something of its native power, Romano-Celts built here, either as a symbolic gesture or to take advantage of ley line influences. Subsequent invaders followed them probably without being aware of the site's mystical importance. Angered by these intrusions, the slumbering power at the roots of Kenilworth was roused to centuries of wrath, enacted, sometimes subtly, upon the unsuspecting residents. It may be that this power could be invoked by moderns: Deliberately, to exploit its strength, or accidentally, by a casual desecration.
- **The Haunted Castle:** In its early days as a fortified Celtic settlement, a horrendous crime was carried out here, and the implications of the violence reverberate down the centuries. The force of the curse has been dissipated by public ownership of the castle, or perhaps the vengeful spirit has simply lain dormant, but now something has happened -- perhaps a local murder too similar in some details to that original crime -- to reawaken the curse and put the entire town at risk.
- **De Clinton's Deal:** Perhaps the meteoric rise of Geoffrey de Clinton wasn't due to his military prowess or political acumen, but rather to a nefarious bargain made with powerful, dark forces? Yes, Kenilworth's troubles could all date back to that favorite device of fiction and myth, a deal with the devil. With its very own Faust as its first tenant, it's no wonder that Kenilworth's owners seem somewhat cursed. Maybe de Clinton evaded the terms of the deal somehow (by magically remaining alive? by finding a loophole?) and the forces of darkness have been taking out their frustrations on Kenilworth ever since.

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Further Reading

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- *Kenilworth Castle: Handbooks for Teachers*. Prepared by English Heritage to help plan a visit to the site, with

an overview of the history and features.

- Maddicott, J.R. *Simon de Montfort*. Biography of the revolutionary leader of the Baron's War.
- Weir, Alison. *The Life of Elizabeth I*. Arguably the definitive biography.

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- Kenilworth in Warwickshire -- <http://www.celcat.com/kworth/index.html> -- Includes visitor's guide, history, bibliography, etc.
- Kenilworth Castle -- <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Hollow/7231/castles/castlekenil.html> -- map, scanned from Toy, of the castle proper
- Kenilworth Castle and the History of Kenilworth -- <http://www.cv81pl.freemove.co.uk/kenilworth.htm> -- Brief history, lots of pictures
- *Kenilworth Today* -- <http://www.kenilworthonline.co.uk/> -- The local newspaper
- Kenilworth Web: Places of Interest -- http://www.kenilworthweb.com/places/kenilworth_castle.shtml -- Handy, brief guide
- ElizabethI.org: Queen's Men: Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. -- <http://www.cv81pl.freemove.co.uk/kenilworth.htm> -- Brief biography with images

More Pictures of Kenilworth

- "360-degree History: Kenilworth" -- http://www.360history.co.uk/kenilworth_castle/grounds.html
- "Adam and Lyn's World Images: Pictures of Kenilworth Castle" -- <http://www.adamandlyn.co.uk/country/thumbskenilworth.shtml>
- "Castles of the World: Kenilworth" -- <http://www.celcat.com/kworth/index.html>
- "Kenilworth Castle in Winter" -- <http://home.freeuk.net/webbuk2/kenilworth-winter.htm>

Tkarsh's Band

by Matt Riggsby

The deserts of western Yrth teem with orcs. The typical orc roves the sands as part of a small band, raiding neighbors and jockeying with his "friends" for power and position, with no greater ambition than to beat the orc next to him.

Tkarsh is not a typical orc. He has far greater dreams than that, even greater than torching the occasional dwarf town. Tkarsh wants *real* power, domination of vast realms of orcs and other races, all subject to his whims. He's a long, long way from achieving that, but he's already gathered a small, effective band of lieutenants whose talents he can bend to his will. With a little time and luck, Tkarsh could become truly dangerous.

Tkarsh

221 points

Tkarsh is the sort of orc intelligent non-orcs worry about. It's not that he's such a great warrior, although he's good enough. It's that he's smart, ambitious, and knows how to motivate his fellow orcs. It's orcs like Tkarsh who turn squabbling tribes who might be happy to bash each other's brains in into vast hordes who prefer to bash in human, elven, and dwarven brains. He hasn't done anything like that yet, but he's still young.

Tkarsh is supremely selfish, even for an orc, but he balances that with a rare foresightedness. Although he certainly doesn't mind destruction and won't hesitate to kill if it serves his purposes, there are other things he enjoys more. You can kill someone once, but you can rule him for *years*.

Attributes: ST 13 [30]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 12 [20]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg. 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 16 [6]; Will 14 [8]; Per 12 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Charisma +2 [10]; Danger Sense [15]; Reputation +2 (as a strong and daring war-leader, recognized by orcs on 12 or less) [3]; Talent: Born War-Leader 3 [15]

Disadvantages: Intolerance (Total) [-10]; Megalomania [-10]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-10]; Ugly [-5]

Quirks: Always wears cast-off finery from defeated enemies [-1]

Skills: Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-15; Broadsword (A) DX+2 [8]-15; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-15; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-14; Leadership (A) IQ+1 [4]-18+*; Public Speaking (A) IQ [2]-14*; Shield (E) DX+1 [2]-14; Stealth (A) DX [2]-13; Strategy (Land) (H) IQ+1 [8]-16†; Survival (Desert) (A) Per [2]-12; Tactics (H) IQ+1 [8]-16†; Throwing (A) DX [2]-13; Whip (A) DX [2]-13.

†: includes +3 from Talent: Born War-Leader (For more information on this talent, see **GURPS Banestorm**, p. 184).

*: includes +2 from Charisma.

Typical equipment: Thrusting broadsword, large knife, whip (reach 3), mail shirt, pot helm, medium shield

Tkarsh's Lieutenants

The exact number of T'Karsh's followers is up to the GM; most of them are generic orc warriors, built on the template at the end of this article. However, Tkarsh has three lieutenants who are first and foremost among his followers.

Ruk

134 points

Tkarsh isn't stupid. Ruk is. He's slow, even for an orc, and easily led. There is speculation that there are some ogres somewhere in his ancestry. He's also very large, very strong, and hard to hurt. He is, in short, a weapon looking for a hand unscrupulous enough to wield him, and he has found that hand in Tkarsh.

Attributes: ST 18 [70]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 8 [-40]; HT 14 [40]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg. 1d+2/3d; BL 58 lbs.; HP 22 [8]; Will 8 [0]; Per 8 [0]; FP 14 [0]; Basic Speed 6.5 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Damage Resistance 2 (Tough Skin -40%) [6]; High Pain Threshold [10]

Disadvantages: Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Gullibility (12) [-10]; Intolerance (Total) [-10]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-10]; Ugly [-5]

Skills: Axe/Mace (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Intimidation (A) IQ+1 [4]-9; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Shield (E) DX+1 [2]-14; Survival (Desert) (A) Per [2]-8; Two-Handed Axe/Mace (A) DX+2 [8]-14.

Typical equipment: Warhammer, leather armor

Gerash al-Nabil

116 points

Where Tkarsh is dangerous because he has a God complex, Gerash is dangerous because he's just plain nasty. Raised by more-or-less civilized orcs living on the fringe of a human village, Gerash was dissatisfied with the small community of converted Muslim orcs with whom he lived. Leaving the village under a cloud (the story changes from time to time, but he boasts of murdering one or both of his parents, a village headman, or a village headman's daughter), he headed back into the desert to find a more interesting life.

He found that life once he hooked up with Tkarsh. If there is unpleasant work to be done -- an assassination, torture, the head of a loved one left in a bed -- Gerash is ready and willing to do it. Like Tkarsh, Gerash finds rampant destruction a waste. He'd rather take his time with it.

Gerash believes that he's Tkarsh's natural successor, although Tkarsh himself is probably incapable of thinking about who might succeed him.

Attributes: ST 12 [20]; DX 14 [80]; IQ 9 [-10]; HT 12 [20]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg. 1d-1/1d+1; BL 29 lbs.; HP 15 [6]; Will 9 [0]; Per 9 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.50 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Arabic (Broken/Illiterate) [2]; Night Vision [10]

Disadvantages: Intolerance (Total) [-10]; Lecherous (12) [-15]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-10]; Sadism (12) [-15]; Ugly [-5]

Quirks: Incessantly cheerful and obsequiously friendly. [-1]

Skills: Bow (A) DX+3 [12]-17; Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-16; Broadsword (A) DX+2 [8]-16; Intimidation (A) IQ+1 [4]-10; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Shield (E) DX+1 [2]-14; Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-16; Survival (desert) (A) Per [2]-9; Throwing (A) DX+1 [4]-15; Whip (A) DX [2]-13.

Typical equipment: thrusting broadsword, several daggers, regular bow, leather armor, small shield.

Ashak

139 points

Ashak says he's in it for the money, pure and simple. However, he is also in it for the self-aggrandizement. Though exceptionally intelligent for his race, he lacks most of the strength and ruthlessness admired by his society, and he's insecure and sensitive about it. As Tkarsh's most important intelligence asset, he's in a valued position close to a formidable warrior and war leader.

Ashak believes that he is Tkarsh's natural successor and is just as wrong as Gerash; indeed, both have probably survived as long as they have because neither could take his place. If something happens to Tkarsh, Ashak and Gerash will probably end up at one another's throats.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 11 [10]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg. 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 13 [6]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Magery 2 [25]; Language: Arabic (Broken/Semiliterate) [4]

Disadvantages: Greed (12) [-15]; Intolerance (Total) [-10]; Jealousy [-10]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-10]; Ugly [-5]

Quirks: Always uses two large words where one short one will do [-1].

Skills: Brawling (E) DX [1]-11; Intimidation (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Occultism (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Shortsword (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Spell Throwing (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Survival (Desert) (A) Per-1 [1]-12; Seek Air (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Purify Air (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Create Air (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Destroy Air (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Earth To Air (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Stench (H) IQ [4]-15; Lightning (H) IQ [4]-15; Explosive Lightning (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Shape Air (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Air Jet (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Wall of Wind (H) IQ [4]-15; Windstorm (H) IQ [4]-15; Seek Earth (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Shape Earth (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Seek Pass (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Earth to Stone (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Earth Vision (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Earthquake (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Simple Illusion (H) IQ [4]-15; Pathfinder (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Seeker (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Trace (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Detect Magic (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Mage Sight (H) IQ-1 [2]-14.

All spells include +2 from Magery

Typical equipment: shortsword, chainmail, writing equipment

Goals and Tactics

Unusual in a race which favors direct attacks, Tkarsh is a master of distraction, deception, and surprise. He takes his time to plan and lay out an assault. His general pattern is to launch a small attack, wait until his opponent is focused on defeating that, and then launch a second, decisive attack from a hidden position on the now weakly protected rear or in a strung-out middle. This can apply to anything from small-group tactics (for example, having Gerash snipe at an enemy, then send Ruk in to take out stragglers when the enemy is trying to chase Gerash down) to grand strategy. Given enough forces and a sufficiently formidable enemy, he might attempt two or even three "feints in force" to get his enemy off guard, and he might even go with the time-honored tactic of a full-frontal assault against a long-time enemy. He is a practitioner of guerilla warfare -- he picks off isolated enemy troops, is dimly aware of the importance of logistics, and may attack an enemy's supply lines to weaken him.

He rarely sacrifices men needlessly, but he is unsentimental about losses in battle. He expects his initial feints to be decimated, and he will let thousands die if it gets him a victory. If anyone in his army looks to be a potential challenger, Tkarsh will offer him a place of honor in the initial charge; most ambitious orcs aren't bright enough to figure out what will happen next, and those who do can hardly refuse for fear of being branded a coward. His only concern is with winning the current battle and retaining enough of a force to win the next one. Since winning generals attract more followers, he rarely feels the need to preserve most of an army.

Though far from honorable, Tkarsh is pragmatic enough to strike short-lived alliances if he feels he absolutely has to. However, he will only do so if he feels he can control the relationship. He has also been known to take hostages to

compel others to be useful to him. Most of his allies and hostages eventually have an unexpected and unpleasant meeting with Gerash.

Tkarsh's egotism may be his only weak point, and he's bright enough that it's a well-defended weakness. A direct approach would be to gain a position of trust (a difficult feat) and convince him that several of his lieutenants were plotting to take his place. This would lead to Tkarsh wiping out his inner circle, temporarily disrupting his ability to lead an effective force. A less dangerous but less effective tactic would be to stay a step removed and sow dissension among his followers.

His companions' tactics are far less sophisticated. If confronted on his own, Ruk has little initiative and will simply fight until disabled or killed. Gerash and Ashak will fight from a distance if possible, up close if they have to (using the dirtiest tactics possible), and either flee or submit if the fight is going against them. Neither has much grasp of tactics, so if leading troops, Gerash will call for frontal assaults, while Ashak will try to emulate Tkarsh's strategies (he is much less skillful). If taken captive, Ruk will be silent, though he can probably be goaded into telling what he knows. Gerash will lie easily and profusely, looking for any chance to escape. Ashak will be defiant, but appeals to his vanity may tease information out of him.

Tkarsh in the Campaign

Tkarsh and his men could be used as anything from a small band of raiders to the leader of an army and his entourage. Whatever his context, Tkarsh can hardly be anything other than an enemy, either present or future. If you're valuable, he will want to rule you, at best. If you look like you might become a threat, he will want you dead. Tkarsh is a potential Napoleon or Mao, or at least a Saddam Hussein: an egotistical dictator who can brook no challenge or dissent. Even as the leader of a very small band, his desire to survive makes him a difficult opponent.

However, he need not be presented solely as the leader of an attacking army. If PCs have an errand which takes them into or near the Orclands (recovering ancient artifacts, for instance), they may pass through Tkarsh's sphere of influence. Tkarsh will recognize useful outsiders when he sees them, and will attempt to use them if he thinks he can profit from the effort. For example, he may offer to guide the PCs on their way if they will assassinate a rival orcish leader, or provide support for an attack on a human town.

Once the PCs perform their part of the bargain, Tkarsh doesn't worry about whether he will need to keep up his end. He is likely to try to kill the characters, either by himself or by betraying them to friends and allies of whomever he enlisted their aid against. If he can help the PCs achieve their goals, he might actually do so -- letting them take whatever risks are involved along the way -- *then* kill them and keep whatever object or benefit the characters hoped to gain. If the PCs appear too powerful to overcome directly, Tkarsh may tell them useful lies to achieve his own goals. ("The lost Dingus of McGuffin? Oh, my neighbor has it, but he won't give it up without a fight. Nope, no way . . .")

Without his forceful personality to hold them together, Tkarsh's followers are interesting but not nearly as difficult to deal with. They are little more than typical raiders with colorful motivations. Ashak in particular will be unusual: a touchy orcish pedant. Depending on his situation, Tkarsh's point cost may increase. As written, he's got a motley crew of three talented but unreliable followers. As the leader of a small group of skilled warriors (say, 10 to 15 orcs built on 50 points), he would gain an Allies advantage worth 8 points. As a notable war chieftain, he'd gain two or three levels of Status, increase the spread of his Reputation, and increase his Allies advantage to at least 24 points. Ruk, Gerash, and Ashak would gain four or five levels of Military Rank, or possibly some form of Social Regard.

Templates

Use these templates to create more orcish warriors and commanders for use with Tkarsh or other orcish war-bands.

Orcish Warrior template

20 points

This is a typical orcish barbarian warrior, interested in little more than destruction and plunder. This template includes traits from the orc template.

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 9 [-20]; **HT** 12 [20]

Advantages: Acute Hearing 2 [4]; Hit Points +3 [6]

Disadvantages: Bully (12) [-10]; Intolerance (Total) [-10]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-10]

Primary Skills: Broadsword (A) DX+1 [4]-12, Axe/Mace (A) DX+1 [4]-12, or Spear (A) DX+1 [4]-12

Secondary Skills: Brawling (E) DX [2]-12; Shield (E) DX [1]-11; Survival/TL (A) Per [2]-9

Background Skills: One of Bow (A) DX-1 [1]-10, Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-10, Throwing (A) DX-1 [1]-10, or Whip (A) DX-1 [1]-10.

Orcish Commander template

55 points

The commander of a troop of orcs is much like his subordinates, only a little bigger, a little smarter, and able to shout a little louder.

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

Advantages: Acute Hearing 2 [4]; Hit Points +3 [6]

Disadvantages: Intolerance (Total) [-10]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-10]; select one of Bully (12) [-10] or Overconfident (6) [-10]

Primary Skills: Broadsword (A) DX+1 [4]-12, Axe/Mace (A) DX+1 [4]-12, or Spear (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Intimidation (A) IQ [2]-10; Leadership (A) IQ [2]-10

Secondary Skills: Brawling (E) DX [2]-12; Shield (E) DX [1]-11; Survival/TL (A) Per [2]-9

Background Skills: Two of Bow (A) DX-1 [1]-10, Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-10, Throwing (A) DX-1 [1]-10, or Whip (A) DX-1 [1]-10.

The Ophiuchus Collection

by Nick Grant

Ponce de Leon arrived in the New World in 1513. Ferdinand Magellan circumnavigated the globe in 1522. King Philip II launched the Spanish Armada in 1588. Of all Spain's seafaring adventures, none has received as much occult attention and as little mainstream notice as the quest of Don Juan de Santandres.

After serving as the Apprentice Seaman on Magellan's ill-fated voyage, de Santandres returned home with a mysterious chest which he obsessively guarded. It stood perhaps two feet tall and three long. Nothing at all seemed remarkable about the chest, except perhaps that such an old box survived termites and weather for so long. The young mariner refused to answer any of the many questions about the chest though, usually launching into fanciful tales of high seas adventure to change the subject.

De Santandres continued his seafaring career, eventually becoming the captain of his own vessel, *Isabella Dulcinea*, and pursued a treasure-hunting career. His crew never seemed willing to discuss the details of any of their voyages, a behavior that's been attributed both to the jittery anxiousness characteristic of his ex-crewmembers and the rumors of lavish wages to buy his men's silence.

After an untimely death in 1562, the Inquisition reclaimed the de Santandres estate. Claiming that the secretive nature of his voyages smacked of some well-covered heresy, they plundered his house and ship. Abundant baubles and curios from far corners of the globe were auctioned off at exorbitant fees, and the ship was bought by the Captain's one time first mate, Miguel de Huelva. The only thing confiscated and kept by the Inquisitorial powers was a strange wooden chest locked in a secret compartment of the Captain's cabin.

The five books locked in the chest have become known as the Ophiuchus Collection, named after the cult that created them. These mystic tomes contained the secrets of the true history of the universe . . . or so they claim. Whether the information they present is accurate or not, each book has peculiar magical properties in its own right.

The Ophiuchus Cult

A mysterious cult of undetermined origin, the Ophiuchus cabal comprised some of the most terrible magical intelligences of the 14th and 15th centuries. Perhaps the only reason that the cabal didn't completely dominate world politics at this time lay in its intense religious fanaticism. By this point, most of the higher-ups in the cabal genuinely believed in their aberrant philosophies, and this obsession barred any useful interaction with society.

Originally, the cult was primarily a political entity. Similar to the more modern freemasons, it was an elite institution in which connections were forged and deals made. However, as it began to attract mystics and magicians, and as the powerful books were introduced, the focus shifted away from political domination toward spiritual enlightenment. At its height, the cabal spanned four continents, with important temples in Southeast Asia, Western Europe, the Arctic, and Northern Africa. However, the fascination with alternate spirituality led to the slow decline of the cabal over the ages. By the time de Santandres got to them, only the final vestiges of the mystery cult remained, with a few of the books having been completely abandoned and a few having become the focal point for splinter cults.

Their secrets were dictated to each generation of neophytes by introduction to their five holy books. After mastering one, the young cultists were allowed to begin study of the next. Each book detailed a phase of the universe. According to the mystics in Ophiuchus, history can be broken down into creation, meaninglessness, the rise of intelligence, the echo of magic, and death. Cynics have been quick to note the rather tenuous link between the actual content of a few of the books and the purported meaning. Whether historical documents or occult curios, the impact that these books have had on magical philosophy since their composition is undeniable.

Book One: Liber Origo

Known under many titles -- Liber Origo, Narcissus' Creation, and Livre Blanc -- this book attracts the widest range of occult scholars and curious investigators. The book of origins always seems to be a blindingly white tome full of crisp blank pages . . . at first. As the curious bookworm chews through the creamy pages he starts to see some traces of patterns and notes. More intense study further fleshes out the lines and relationships which the book outlines. Each time the scholar comes back to the book he finds everything he previously saw in the book, and a little more.

No one has quite been able to agree on the text of this book. The dominant theory is that there's no precise text written on those crisp white pages, but that it acts as a sort of mirror for the reader. Intuitive and creative expressions of the universe fill the pages, and the scholar discerning it can read his own thoughts unabashed by psychological blocks and wards which might normally block his creativity. Naturally, hermeticists and other high magic advocates generally disagree.

As the sorcerer falls deeper into study of this book, he grows less willing to part with it. The obsessive effect is exponential, quickly growing from a preference to a desire to a necessity. However, so long as he has the book and actively studies it, the spellcaster's knowledge of magic grows more powerful. Stealing the tome from a mage, or forcefully removing it from him generally results in depression and, in severe cases, psychological withdrawal for the previous owner. The symptoms of this are various, but generally include sweating, panic attacks, and in severe cases logorrhea.

Book Two: Liber Null

This second tome appears at first identical to the Liber Origo. An egg-shell white leather cover pads this hefty tome from the anxious gripping and sweaty hands that have handled it throughout the ages. This, combined with the initially blank pages have fooled many uninitiated into the cult into actually believing that this was the famed Liber Origo. Nothing could be further from the truth though, as the worried wizard discovers on his third fruitless night searching through Liber Null for any hope of pattern or word.

If not the entirely enlightening, it is the most precise to define the second book of Ophiuchus by what isn't. It's not a spell list, or a system of invocation. It's not a history, a treatise, a theory or a factual account of any set of events. It's no allegory, no drama, and certainly no fable. However, it *does* impart the sense of all these things.

This book has been the source of much contention. Blasphemers (or, if you prefer, realists) reject it as a significant magical work. They write it off as some minor glamorous enchantment that has little to no effect on the tapestry of magic. They prefer not to discuss the disturbing visions and unusual deaths associated with the book -- sfilng those under "unsophisticated illusion traps" and moving quickly on. Its proponents however, dwell on these elements and read further into them.

Specifically, on the third day spent studying this book the reader is overcome with an intense sense of ennui. Usually taking the day off from whatever he was doing, he goes home and retires for an early night. Fitful sleep, night terrors, and occasionally delirium for several minutes after waking have all been reported to be connected with this first night. The situation grows worse as the book owner spends more and more time flipping through those blank pages, usually hovering near a catatonic stupor. The individual becomes entirely incommunicative. As study continues, they do less and less -- skipping meals, staying awake, and seemingly slipping away into an entirely interior world.

After a month (dictated by the lunar cycle, not the calendar), the spell dissipates. If the book is removed before that time is up (which is more common outside the rigorous confines of the cult, as it is very hard for a catatonic to defend themselves from the sort who could find this tome) the magician generally takes some permanent insanity -- paranoia, night terrors, and a whole host of phobias are fairly common. However, a wizard who can complete the ordeal gains mastery of a chilling daemonology. Among successful readers of the Liber Null are the writers of *Grimoire Qlippah*, *Shadow Daemons*, and *Other Monsters: Entities With Whom it is Unwise to Deal*.

Book Three: Liber Atrox

The Book of Consumption has a peculiar history. In the Ophiuchus, the keepers of the holy books held one of the most esteemed positions. Their original responsibilities only required them to keep the cult's secrets away from the public eye. However, a natural outgrowth was that whoever held one particular book would be the one to teach its secrets to supplicants. Teaching methods, as they often do in occult circles, grew stranger and more intricate as time passed, and as the keeper's job became more focused on teaching they brought on younger cult members to help maintain secrecy and assist them in menial activities.

In the case of The Book of Consumption, this grew to a critical point 20 years before de Santandres landed in the Filipines with Magellan -- a splinter cabal formed around the book, claiming it was the only key necessary for human perfection. The temple of the flesh nested itself within the jungles prevalent on the islands, and there practiced its rituals in solitude until Magellan came, bearing with him a treasure: a hungry and discontent crew. Official cult doctrine stated that it documented only the rise of intelligences as part of the universe's natural cycle. It took the warped mind of the cultist though, to see any actual connection between mental evolution and this volume.

The Book of Consumption (or Liber Atrox, as it is sometimes known) is a large volume bound in some unidentified scaly skin. Perfectly smooth along the back and spine, a grotesque face screams, frozen on the front cover. A hand arising out of the scales clasps the book shut with a rigor mortis stronger than any attempts yet made to dislodge it. A drop of warm blood into the curiously deep mouth is all that can coax that hand open, and this must be applied every time that the reader hopes to access its contents.

Cannibalistic rituals are the focus on this book. Through particular rites, the initiate learns to consume not only the physical mass of a person, but also (depending on the spell used) their strength, knowledge, and even their identity. These rituals are highly dangerous to practice for more reasons than kuru. If the initiate prepares a sample wrong, utters an incorrect syllable in an incantation, or even deviates from the proscribed thought patterns, he runs the risk of channeling the spirit he's trying to incorporate. There are also very few places in the world that value freedom of religion highly enough to allow the power-hungry (literally) sorcerer to continue his craft. Even more so than normal, secrecy is of the highest priority for devotees of this book.

Book Four: Liber Sapientia

The most straightforward of the five books, the Echo of Magic (Liber Sapientia) is an ordinary spell book. It outlines the processes behind creating second- and third-generation intelligences (that is, creatures with will, and creatures with will that can create other creatures with will). The flexibility of the system explained in the fourth book gives the wizard startling range to work with, allowing him to forge physical vessels for individual ideas or create spirits out of physical phenomena like plagues. Form, idea, and consciousness are seamlessly integrated as the lines between different parts of reality break down and bleed into each other.

The bizarre factor of the book lies not in its contents, so much as how it is used. Experiences within the cult form the adept into a unique (and often quite mad) individual who, by this point, will employ creative magic in a very strange way. Documented projects that sprang from study of the Liber Sapientia are the foundation of the cult of Garganosh (an Ophiuchus elder who fancied himself akin to a god), the creation of more than 200 magical diseases (including new strains of lycanthropy that combine animal life with plants, fungi, and bacteria instead of the traditional wolves and bears) and intelligent colors who converse fluently in all languages.

Book Five: Liber Decessus

The highest honor for a cultist was to read from the Liber Decessus. Very few of the already sparse cultist population ever reached this tome, even among the higher tiers. The book is bound in simple black leather, with its title illuminated in silver letters on its cover. Found by de Santandres in an ice cave beneath the North Pole, the contents of this book were one of the only things more inaccessible than its physical location.

To this day, no one is sure what topics the Livre Mort touches. A few cases of cultists reading it have been documented, and a generally predictable series of events transpires in each case (save one -- the infamous occultist de Roch had a very peculiar reaction to this book). Initially, the volume is always found in shadow. Even in places that generally wouldn't cause a shadow, the book seems to find some inky darkness to dwell in -- bent light rays and morphed shadows always manage to envelop the book somehow.

The physical texture of the book is cold and usually slick, though whether this is a magical effect or due to the fact that light seems to have trouble hitting it is only a matter for speculation. The next recurrent event occurs when someone starts to read it: It is impossible to stop. The reader's eyes are compelled onward to the next word and the next word and so on until they flip the page. No one who has caught glimpses of the pages can seem to recall any of their contents, only that they were psychically appalled and could not bear to view it for more than a second or two.

The individual reading it, though, can't seem to get enough. As he continues on, his breathing slows and a pallor spreads over his face and hands. His heart rate gradually drops through the first half of the book until it finally simply stops. (Note that this process usually takes around three days. This fact has led many occultists to conclude that the book not only has the deteriorative effect described here, but also some sustaining effect as the mage reads on with no sleep, food, or water.) Through the second half of the book the reader's skin starts to sink and recede, eventually cracking to show dry veins and muscles underneath. Around the final fifth of the book most of the skin has shriveled away, and the cursed man's muscles start to fall apart, and his bones to deteriorate. By the end of the book, all that remains are a thin network of muscles clasped around chicken-like bones, supporting two withered eyes. After the reader finishes the final page, he collapses in a heap of dust and blows away.

This has happened each time the book has been read, save one. de Roch took it upon himself to go search for the complete collection. He found and read each of them in order, except for the Liber Decessus, which took him several more decades to locate and read. A certain scribe accompanying him described his final hours thus:

"The master is nearly completely gone. All he's left is some vague outline of his eyes and enough willpower to turn the pages of this accursed book. I am surely damned that I've watched this detestable ritual . . . [missing text here] fascinating! In his final hour before collapsing I saw some fantastical indigo glow from the book pierce through his eyes. In some final triumphant rush a whole outline of his body appeared in the glow, before disappearing in a flash of light! What may this portend? Surely I may read this book and discover some beautiful reunion with my master!" This log has, naturally, become hotly sought after itself. It sheds no light on the book, but does give it some strange overtones.

Adventure Seeds

The Ophiuchus collection leaves itself open to a lot of adventure opportunities, from campaigns centered around assembling the set of five to a single session that includes the Liber Null as a particularly nasty piece of loot. Some possibilities include:

- **A Mad Mentor:** One way to drive home the psychological effects of the first tome is to put it in the hands of someone close to the adventurers. If a mentor came into possession of it, he could at first easily convince the investigators of its value. However, as time passes, he falls deeper under its spell, eventually refusing to see anyone and even putting up defenses against people trying to get near the book. How long will the party allow this obsessiveness to continue?
- **Nihilistic Nepotism:** A young sorceress has gotten a hold of the Liber Null and is spending a suspicious amount of time whispering in the shadows of her house while her quiet parents stay locked in their bedchamber.
- **The Atrocities of Atrox:** A cannibalizing cult has gotten its hands on the Book of Consumption, and are using the foul magic within to perfect their physical forms. Gruesome murders, eery lackeys, and power-mad cult leaders run amok!
- **The Marquis Magician:** A certain hedonistic nobleman has come into a copy of the Liber Sapientia and has begun using it to create mischievous imps and sprites that are wreaking havoc in a small town.
- **de Roch's Disguise:** The notorious arcanist gained new insights into death and magic in his adventures after

surviving Liber Decessus. Only recently has he returned to the material plane, manifesting as a glowing entity in the vicinity of the book. The locals are aware of its significance and hire the heroes to deal with the problem.

Pyramid Review

Infinifield

Infinifield

Published by [Infinifield, Inc.](#)

24 plastic blocks in various colors, five pawns, & rules (in Spanish, English, and Russian), boxed; \$19.99



Making your own playing surface is no new idea for gaming. There are plenty of "build your own board" games, and several where the construction changes things from one iteration to the next. *Infinifield* takes its name from the fact that it has a nearly endless arrangement of pieces.

The object of the game is to score the most points by being the last pawn standing.

Your battlefield is a series of plastic boxes in various colors and sizes. Each one is about half an inch thick and an inch and a half wide. Length varies from a couple of inches to almost a foot, depending on the piece in question. Each round, someone is chosen to be the field builder; it's their job to construct the board for that round of play. There are certain rules to putting it together, but most of these are either obvious or are needed to make the game work. There must be space on each block to place a pawn, the tiles cannot be tilted, they must all be part of a single pile, etc. Beyond that, it's open season. You can stack all the pieces next to one another to create an orderly little pyramid, or stagger them and leave them all over the table like pieces of metal in a junkyard.

Infinifield

The white blocks are a kind of connective tissue for the game. They have to be spaced out a bit, and no single colored block may touch more than two of them. Everyone starts the round sitting atop their own white space, and on their turn the player moves his pawn to an adjacent block. This is a chase, and if you land your pawn on another pawn, you capture them and eliminate that counter from the game. There is a fifth pawn, used on a printed diagram included with the rules, showing a circular pattern. Every turn after taking his move the player moves the pawn on this little roundabout. It's five spaces, and the fifth space is marked with an X. Whoever moves the tracking pawn onto the X removes a block from the pile (circumstances dictate this generally won't be the same person every time). There are certain rules here as well . . . you cannot take a piece if it splits the board in two, for example.



As pawns get hemmed in like this, it becomes harder to evade other players, and someone will make the final tag to win the round. The next player then builds a new field. After playing a few rounds and adding all the scores (there are a couple of different ways suggested for scoring), someone will be the overall winner.

This may be one of the sturdiest games ever made. The box is tough enough (it has to be) to hold all the heavy-duty pieces, and those pieces should be able to weather any kind of damage shy of gunfire. They seem like rejected segments taken from a construction site or art project. The pawns are the sort anyone can buy from a game supply shop.

The mechanics are simple, and offer just enough tweaks along the way to make what seems like a simple game a little better. Unfortunately, it just isn't enough to really hold the interest. This isn't chess, but there's a certain feeling of mathematical certainty that suggests the outcome is all but predetermined once the pieces are set down. The only thing keeping you from knowing who's going to win may be those algebra classes you skipped out on in high school.

Although advertised as a game for two to four players, one should limit one's games to three and four players. With only two, the moves become predictable, and it's just as likely those two will continue to bounce back and forth on the same two blocks endlessly, waiting for the other to make a mistake. The whole thing will probably be decided when the missing blocks close out an escape route, not when someone pulls out an amazing and wholly unexpected move.

Infinifield's small pawn diagram is printed on the rules themselves, so you have to keep the sheet where you can see the picture and the rules or else you have to photocopy the diagram. Since the pawn on the picture has to be moved every single turn, it's easy for the group to forget who has or hasn't moved it, or whether it's been moved at all. The whole thing is a great idea that sounds better on the box than it feels in play. Lacking the variety, spice, or punch of other such games, the genius in absentia of this pastime leaves you wanting just a little bit more.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Worlds of Cthulhu #2 (for *Call of Cthulhu*)

Published by [Pegasus Press](#)

Edited by Keith Herber & Adam Crossingham

Written by Anne Abelein, Adam Crossingham, Samar Ertsey, Adam Scott Glancy, Joachim Hagen, Florian Hardt, Daniel Harms, Mark Harris, Frank Heller, Steven Kaye, Christopher Maser, Mike Mearls, Andreas Melhorn, Matthias Oden, & Tina Wessel

Translated by Robert Maier, Calum McDonald, Alexandra Velten, Hans-Christian Vortisch, & Bill Walsh

Cover by Francois Launet

Illustrated by Koen Goorickx, David Lee Ingersoll, Francois Launet, Natalie Sandells, & Taschira

Cartography by Allyn Bowker, David Conyers, Kostja Kleye, Björn Lensig, & Chris Schlict

130-page perfect bound black & white book; \$18.00

The publication of [Cthulhu Dark Ages](#) opened up the possibility of source material and support published in Germany by Pegasus Spiele being translated into English, rather than the other way around. Unfortunately, this is something that Chaosium has yet to exploit, leaving room for Pegasus Spiele to take advantage of this as Pegasus Press. Not with supplements like *Malleus Monstrorum*, *Berlin -- im Herzen der grossen Stadt*, and *Wales*, but with material taken from their magazine, *Cthuloide Welten*. Now appearing in an English edition, *Worlds of Cthulhu* bridges the gap between magazine and supplement, appearing only twice a year and being only 130 pages long. The idea is not just to reprint some of the best articles from the German editions, but to eventually accept English language submissions as well.

Worlds of Cthulhu is edited by Keith Herber, the author of such classics as *The Fungi From Yuggoth*, and by Adam Crossingham, the editor of the *Cthulhu Now/Delta Green* fanzine, [The Black Seal](#). The translation work for this issue has been handled well, and the writing is both engaging and informative. The magazine is laid out in neat and tidy fashion that makes it a far better looking affair than many of Chaosium's official releases. The cover is a suitably disturbing depiction of Y'golonac, whilst the internal art is at least reasonable. Where appropriate, the articles make use of period photographs, whilst the various handouts and maps are all done to a decent standard.

Worlds of Cthulhu #2 opens with a *Cthulhu by Gaslight* offering. Frank Heller's "The Good, The Bad, And The Utterly Insane" provides everything necessary to run a campaign in the Wild West except, essentially, the background.

For this it recommends several other sourcebooks, including *GURPS Old West*, *Sidewinder Recoiled*, [The Knuckleduster Firearms Shop](#), and [The Knuckleduster Cowntown Creator](#). Instead, it adds several new skills, such as True Grit ("I ain't dead yet . . ."), Quick Draw (modifies an investigator's Draw! rating), and Spit. New rules cover combat Old West style, cinematic rules for the Keeper that wants them, and a guide to "Goin' Plum Loco." All of the expected occupations are present, as well as a number of Backgrounds, including Chinaman, Immigrant, Indian, and Mexican, purchased with a character's skill points. Each gives attribute and skill modifiers, in addition to being a very nice method of customizing characters to the setting. Unfortunately, what is a very solid article is let down by the scenario, "The Hunt for Kid Richter," which -- although providing a reason for the characters to be together -- is really just an opportunity to test out the combat mechanics. It does hint at a more occult-themed scenario to come, but the lack of one now is deeply unsatisfying.

"In the Grip of Madness" by Joachim Hagen and Samar Ertsey appears to be just another article on mental disorders, but it goes beyond the theoretical to suggest how both Keeper and players should portray them during the game. Adam Crossingham and Daniel Harms continue their exploration of Clark Aston Smith's Averoigne begun in issue #1 as an alternative setting for *Cthulhu Dark Ages*, with a gazetteer and a list of its occult and Mythos tomes, while Tina Wessel offers a look at an archetypal figure of the 1920s with "The Flapper -- The New Generation of Women in the 1920s." This is an informative and interesting piece whose use stretches throughout the decade.

In absence of continued support for Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green* setting, the magazine contains a regular column, "Directives From A Cell" by Adam Scott Glancy. This issue extends the previous column's discussion of the game's foreign audience's penchant for creating home-grown agencies devoted to fighting the Mythos. The effect of this is to have too many agencies similar to Delta Green, but what of an *ad hoc* government groups set up to deal with conspiracies (with a small "c")? Modelled from the South African Police Service's "Occult Related Crimes Unit" established to deal with witchcraft-related crimes, the idea is to have a small group brought together to investigate crimes like slave trafficking, smuggling, and so on, which could have links to the occult or even the Mythos at a very low level. The column provides a good starting point for a more downscale campaign with a grubbier edge. The second column supports [Cthulhu d20](#), Mike Mearls offering several original feats. A new type is the Stress Feat, which only comes into play when an investigator is in danger. For example, Adrenaline Rush gives a bonus to a pre-selected attribute when triggered, while Heroic Sacrifice lets a character swap places with another who is in great danger and take some of the damage they would have suffered. The other new general feats provide benefits when an investigator is conducting research or has been driven insane. Statistics for all of the magazine's scenarios and articles for *Cthulhu d20* is available from its website.

The first of the issue's three scenarios is one of two one-shots. Florian Hardt's "The Singer from Dhol" is designed for four to five players and is set on Oyster Island, off the coast of Maine. Inspired by an M.R. James short story, the players take the role of members of the Gullson family, island farmers ill liked by the other inhabitants. The story at first concerns a squabble over the will of the family late matriarch, but dark secrets and histories soon come to light. The second one-shot is "The Icarus Project: An Adventure in the Far Future" by Christoph Maser and Matthias Oden. Set in the 27th century, it is again designed for five players with pre-written characters who awaken aboard a seemingly abandoned ship that was sent to rescue its sister ship. Her maiden voyage and testing of a new FTL drive involved a journey to the center of the universe. In a universe where the Mythos is a reality, this of course, can only be a bad thing. Like all three scenarios, it is well written, and comes with good staging advice for the Keeper.

Because these two scenarios are one-shots, the issue suffers for it. Of the two, "The Singer from Dhol" is the more adaptable, easily transposed to other times and places. More useful then, is "Super 8," a modern-set scenario that takes place in New York. Written by Andreas Melhorn, it is also suited for use with *Delta Green* as it delves into the dark and seedy side of the city's underworld. It shares thematic similarities to the scenario "Love's Lonely Children" from the recently reprinted anthology *The Stars Are Right!*, but this a far more easily run affair, one that provides a Mythos tainted twist upon the snuff flick.

It is fair to say that the contents of this issue are far more interesting and possess far more of an edge than the material in Chaosium's releases of late. Unfortunately it suffers because two of its three scenarios are one-shots, making it less useful to the Keeper wanting scenarios and articles to support his own campaign. That said, the articles on mental disorders and the flapper are both helpful support, and the scenario "Super 8" will be sure to please both the *Cthulhu*

Now and the **Delta Green** referee. And while "The Good, The Bad, And The Utterly Insane" is a fine article in its own right, the lack of a good scenario to support it, is both a shame and an opportunity missed. Still, this second issue of **Worlds of Cthulhu** further showcases some of the more than excellent material appearing in the German language.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Federation Commander: Klingon Border

Designed by Stephen V. Cole

Published by [Amarillo Design Bureau, Inc.](#)

Boxed game; \$59.95

Federation Commander: Klingon Border is the latest in the Star Fleet Universe family of games from Stephen Cole's starshipyard at Amarillo Design Bureau. Should you reach up on the shelf to take this down for inspection, beware! The box is densely packed and much heavier than you might expect. What do you get for your hard-earned cash and muscular exertion?

The second thing I noticed after sliding off the full-color slip cover and opening the plain white box underneath was the map panels. Gone is flimsy black hex map sheet. Instead you get six thick letter-size panels with full-color space photography (care of NASA), marked in 5/8" hexes on one side and 1-1/4" hexes on the other. Space wargamers who deal with hexagons probably just got their investment's worth right there. These are also being sold separately as the "Deluxe Space Battle Maps" (\$29.95), which includes these same six panels plus two more with planet art.

The game also includes two six-sided dice, a grease pencil, a pinch of paper clips in a zip-bag, two sheets of counters (one in the 1/2-inch size, color-keyed by government, for use on the small-hex map; the other with full-color ship art on 1" counters), a pair of helper sheets for using plastic or metal miniatures with the game, two laminated reference cards (full-page size, both sides used) and sixteen laminated half-page cards for the ships. The 52-page staple-bound rulebook presents a very complete set of rules in a very concise manner.

The ship cards are what you tend to notice first. Each ship is represented by a single card. On one side, the "Squadron Scale" representation is the very familiar ship display from **Star Fleet Battles**. On the other, the "Fleet Scale" version has all its features reduced by half: power produced, shield strengths, number of weapons, etc. One new feature is the vigorous use of color to key system types and other game information. One gets used to the riot of hues after a while. The lamination allows easy marking and reuse without resorting to photocopiers. (Only one card for each type of ship is provided, leaving players using multiple vessels of the same type to head for the copy shop or scanner-printer anyway.) The Fleet Scale is intended for introductory or faster play, or for use in large multi-ship actions; the Squadron Scale for the hardcore highly-detailed ship combats.

Playing **Federation Commander: Klingon Border** will be very familiar to those acquainted with the **Star Fleet Battles** game, yet with some very new wrinkles. The Ship Log, for recording energy use, is gone (and won't be missed). Instead you have freeform allocation using tokens, or the provided counters or running paper clips along the Power Track on the edge of each ship card. The turn begins by establishing a "Base Speed" (movement eats the most reliable chunks of your energy reserve, so it's better to front-load that decision). During the eight phases of the turn, you pay as you go to modify your speed, fire weapons, operate ship systems, and so on. At the end of the turn, a few housekeeping chores set you up for the next turn.

While some of the movement rules have changed, the overall principles are still the same: proportional movement through the turn, restrictions on turning and slipping (moving forward but into a hex to the side) and so on. Markers are now provided to help the captain remember when he last turned or slipped; this makes abiding by the rules much less taxing on the player's memory.

The combat rules are likewise slightly streamlined but still familiar: weapons can only fire in specific "arcs" relative to

the ship's heading; tables and die rolls determine total damage points; and rolling on an allocation table converts those points into specific damage. Damage allocation takes about one-tenth the rolls that it used to, and the table itself is smaller than it was. Options to "target weapons" or "target engines" shift the damage table used, giving a very clean approach to a very traditional element from starship battles in the television shows and movies.

After trying out some basic duels at both the Squadron and Fleet scales, I can report that this rules set works as advertised. On the simpler scale, a basic shootout took a little under an hour and didn't feel skimpy. That matches the best time I had for a duel in ***Star Fleet Battles***, using extensive automation (a self-written computer aid) to help with movement and damage. A multi-ship action in the smaller scale progressed smartly with no confusion from loss of momentum during turn changes or other chores. The duel at the squadron scale was still involved, but managed to be smoother than previous experiences with the older game.

I find only a few drawbacks to the set. As mentioned earlier, the coloring takes getting used to. Over a dozen tints may be on any given document. Also mentioned earlier, while the laminated ship cards are nicely reusable, they don't quite free the players from the tyranny of the copier. The other weak component of the game is the rulebook. There is no cover; it is basically 26 11×17 sheets, printed and then folded and stapled. This gives it a flimsy feel. The table of contents only lists the rules chapters and sections. Discussion of the in-game history (and such niceties as the publisher's credits) don't appear there or in the reasonably thorough index. I would have appreciated a fully-worked example, say watching a classic duel step-by-step with rules cross-references, as an aid to familiarization and morale.

When I first opened this game and read it, I was faintly disappointed. The early press information had suggested that the Federation Commander series would be a very different critter from ***Star Fleet Battles***, much more abstract and higher-tempoed. Instead, it seemed to me just ***Star Fleet Battles*** respun. After some more reading, I accepted it for what it was and did some playing. With the generally higher production values, sturdy and reusable components and optimized rules, ADB is able to keep their invested starship library and put it to work inside a better, friendlier (but still serious) game. ***Star Fleet Battles*** is not going away, but if it did, ***Federation Commander: Klingon Border*** would be a worthy heir and a solid foundation on which to expand farther into the final frontier.

--Bob Portnell

You Say "Anarchy" Like It's a Bad Thing . . .

Last week we looked at some burning questions that face practically any RPG campaign world, such as ["Are there mashed potatoes in heaven?"](#)

One of the underlying questions that remained untouched in that column, mostly to leave another 1,000+ words unwritten for the next installment due 168 hours later, is how to make a different societal construct truly understandable . . . or at least different-feeling.

As one example that came up last week, I was trying to think of a (Classic) *Star Trek* episode or movie (or even novel or comic) where the audience was supposed to think Spock was a ripe bastard. As a Vulcan, his species that has dedicated itself to logic above all else. Really, that should time and again rub humans (the majority audience for the various *Star Trek* series) the wrong way. I mean, if Spock is in command of the *Enterprise* and he concludes with a 67% probability that the only way to save 70% of the ship is to feed the other 30% of the crew to a Mr. Horrible Gelatinous Monster, then I'm guessing he'd be at the front, tossing redshirts into its maw. And if it would add an extra 0.5% probability of success to marinate the crew first, then he'd be cracking open the Lea & Perrins.

Roleplaying games are chock full of alien mindsets and cultures that, too often, don't end up *feeling* alien; by reclaiming that alien-ness, you can add more freshness and interest to a campaign than a hundred splatbooks or Ultimate Collections of Geegaws. Continuing our example on logic, in one *In Nomine* game I was playing my Elohite (think "supremely logical angelic Vulcan"), and the other player was running a Malakite (think "warrior Angel").

Our super-fast human-looking quarry had escaped out the window of an apartment, and the police were pounding down the door, reacting to a commotion. Thinking quickly, my character handed his gun to the other PC and said, "Shoot me." After protesting, I told him more insistently, "Shoot me!"; he did. After that, I snatched the gun from him and shot *him*; I then proceeded to wipe down the gun and toss it out the window.

The police barged in, and -- still profusely bleeding -- I explained that some guy shot us before escaping out the window. I then offered a description of our prey.

When the GM asked why I did that, I explained: "Well, as I perceived them, the problems we faced were: 1) Chasing our quarry, and 2) needing to escape or deal with the police, 3) without having to answer a lot of strange questions. We were incapable of doing #1 with #2 looming over us. So, by shooting ourselves and fingering someone else, we almost certainly send the police searching for the bad guy. And the ambulance ride should take care of #3 while we think of a new plan." The GM nodded and obliged us with an ambulance ride (our characters, that is . . . it'll be one goofy plan too many if the GM ever obliges me as a player with an ambulance ride).

Of course, all this talk of alien cultures doesn't even begin to touch upon one of the most potentially alien societies: other eras of humanity.

In last week's column I posited a society where there wouldn't need locks on doors; the notion simply wouldn't occur to them. Now, while some folks scoff at this idea (including, I confess, myself on some level), I note that humanity has always acted -- or *not* acted -- in certain ways because the idea of doing otherwise was inconceivable; social inertia is a powerful force.

As one example, envision asking modern people, "Why aren't you wearing armor?" The answers to this could fill a column on its own (probably a very dull column, but still . . .); nevertheless, I suspect most versions of this Socratic dialog would ping-pong along the line of:

- "I'm not in danger." (Is the modern person in less day-to-day danger than your average fantasy city-dweller?)
- "It wouldn't do any good against modern weapons." (Depends on the armor; regardless, some protection would be better than none.)
- "It's against the law." (I don't think so, but who knows *what's* illegal nowadays?)

And so on.

Of course, for most folks the *real* answer would probably be along the lines of, "I never even thought of it." And, even if someone *did* think of it, it would probably be a fleeting "Why the heck did I just think *that*? kind of thought. (Of course, if you hang around with people who *do* wear armor daily, then that speaks more to your choice of friends than the general state of the world.)

Many eras of humanity have ideas about what's right and wrong that can make modern folks scratch their heads. (Of course, so do some other cultures.) As a minor example, my stepfather recently went to India to train some folks in their early 20s. He was showing off pictures from my recent wedding, and they were all appreciative and interested. However, one thing that they found very strange was the notion of the husband and wife kissing during the service, in front of their families; a few of the women he was teaching said that their parents (who were in their 40s) would have fainted in church at such a display!

Of course, I'm amused at the notion of American churches being thought of as such dens of depravity (insert your own joke here) because they actually permit kissing on holy ground. But, on reflection, it's not like kissing is a biological necessity or mandate from the heavens; it's just something we do.

Many RPGs sidestep the notion of alternate or advanced social development; even my beloved **Torg**, which has one of its four core axioms devoted to the social development of a society, provides almost no fully-fleshed examples of cultures more socially advanced than modern Earth. (The only one from the Core Set, the corporate espionage Nippon Tech, basically waved away its one-point improvement over our Earth by saying, "Well, sure, it *would* be more advanced, but Evil People are repressing the society . . .")

Of course, from a conceptual point of view it's pretty obvious that one of the biggest problems with trying to describe a more socially advanced society is that, if you could conceive it, it could probably be done by the "real" world. But as satisfying as it can be to visualizing whirled peas, the more fruitful option (at least from an RPG point of view) is to think of the desired conclusion, and work toward that.

Why? Because practically anything you can envision can be argued for as being correct, and -- more to the point -- could probably be thought of by a society as the *only* correct option. Usually this notion of "That's just the way we do things" is used to hand-wave away things from the modern society's past: infanticide, permitting 12-year-old girls to marry, legalized slavery or racism, and so on. But the same hand-waving technique of "How would we do things any other way?" can be used to visualize more advanced or better societies (or at least alternate ones).

One memorable episode of the *New Twilight Zone* series was called "To See The Invisible Man"; it was adapted from a short story of the same name. Basically, a criminal is sentenced to a year of being "invisible": He has a mark placed on him that signifies the rest of society is supposed to ignore him, but otherwise has no other punishment imposed. On the surface, this strikes us as odd. But look at it from the point of view of the story's society: The criminal isn't taking resources in the same way that expensive prisons are, and it quite possibly places more of an emphasis on the rehabilitative aspects of punishment.

So, as a worked example, we would probably envision a society without laws to be much less advanced one. However, it's possible to turn that around and visualize it as a positive: What if local communities simply relied on their own judgment of right and wrong, exerting social pressure on those who threatened to step outside the order and taking more aggressive action for those persistent transgressors? The members of that society might find notions of codified laws to be quaint and baffling, since if you aren't doing anything wrong then you don't need laws. (There are a handful of *Star Trek* tales that deal with this concept to varying degrees.)

As another worked example, what if the notion of privacy was eliminated? While it's possible to cast this in a dystopian "the government can watch everyone" light, it's also possible to say that society has evolved beyond such notions: If you know enough not to go poking around in others' business if it's no business of your own, then what does privacy matter? If everyone is equally open and vulnerable, then it's possible to envision that everyone will leave everyone else alone. (One modern analogy of this that can be extrapolated is the idea of property rights. For most of

Western society, the notion of land ownership was an infinite three-dimensional construct: If you own a 100-acre square of land, you own everything below to the center of the earth and everything above to the infinite heavens. However, the invention of the airplane required a rethinking of this idea, since the need to get permission from a zillion different landowners to make one transcontinental flight would be impossible. Therefore, people in the modern world just accept that planes can fly over "their" land, even though they've lost a right they used to have. Same thing with privacy: By permitting everyone access to "your" space, you trust society to use that space responsibly.)

Mind you, I don't think I could handle living in either society, since I rather like law and order and privacy.

The notion of a more socially advanced society is a difficult one to grasp, but I think it's one of those things like pornography: Folks know it when they see it. And it's especially useful in an RPG to start with the effects of the more socially advanced society, and work backwards to why people believe that way. Because, looking at the way we muddle along in the real world, trying to advance our thought processes from now to a more perfect society is going to take a *long* time.

--*Steven Marsh*

Primary Sources

There Was a Trilogy From Nantucket

The Nantucket Trilogy

Written by S.M. Stirling

Published by Roc

The Nantucket Trilogy, by S.M. Stirling, consists of the books *Island in the Sea of Time*, *On the Oceans of Eternity*, and *Against the Tide of Years*. These books are one of the best sources for those interested in time travel or interdimensional gaming. This review will describe the plot in broad outlines, with only minor spoilers, then will move to gaming applications.

In these books the island of Nantucket is transported, through unexplained means, to the year 1250 B.C. The repercussions of this, and how the inhabitants handle it, forms the plot of the story. The Nantucketers (called "Eagle People" by the natives of 1250 B.C.) first have to deal with the psychological shock of being separated from all they know and then the even more pressing matter of how to feed themselves. Stirling manages to handle the psychological element in an interesting manner by making the reader an observer of the shock's outcome, rather than slowing the pace of the story by focusing on someone's inner pain.

The search for food brings the Eagle people (on the Coast Guard sailing ship the *Eagle*, which was also brought along to the past) to England, to trade for grain and animals. This trip eventually draws them into the politics of the Old World. It does this by planting ideas into the head of a Coast Guard officer, William Walker, who eventually leads away a small group of Nantucketers to found a European empire using 20th century technology.

This rebellious splinter group creates most of the rest of the plot as the Eagle people form an army and navy to fight a protracted war against a growing number of adversaries, as knowledge of gunpowder and other advanced technology begins to proliferate throughout the world. We eventually follow the soldiers and sailors of Nantucket into battle in Mexico, England, all across the Mediterranean, around the Horn of Africa, and across the Middle East. There are politics, spying, trade, and war involving Olmecs, Babylonians, Assyrians, Mycenaeans, Hittites, Trojans, Egyptians, and others.



We also follow non-military characters as they explore (including an expedition across North America), run spying operations and plan policy. The books are accurate and include facts and details that add a realistic feel to this inherently unrealistic genre. They do so without being tedious and usually maintain the pace of the story. They have a great balance of plot, setting, and characterization. The battles are detailed enough to be visualized, but not so long as to be boring.

There are a few hand-to-hand combat scenes which are easy to follow and brief enough to remain interesting even to those uninterested in the choreography of fights.

The Nantucket Trilogy would serve as an excellent setting for a roleplaying game. It could be lifted entirely without modification and provide ample scope for character development and adventures of all types. The reader should be warned that these books are fairly savage and also contain scenes that include sadism, rape, and sexual torture. They are not described in detail, but are definitely present.

One thing that a GM could do would be to have players make characters from the 1990s (giving them a little help with skill selection), then send them to Nantucket on vacation or whatever, then spring the transition on them the same way that it was sprung on the characters in the book. How will the characters cope? How will they fit into the new society? How will the character with the wealth advantage cope with its sudden loss? (Here the GM should probably subtly reimburse the player with other advantages.)

As the story progresses, the characters can become involved in soldiering or sailing in the military. They could club together to buy a boat and trade across the oceans, fighting the growing number of pirates and opening new markets. The first group to get trade established in China, India, or the Persian Gulf would make a fortune. They could become spies, matching the tradecraft they have learned through modern spy novels against the best counterintelligence of the Egyptians. Alternatively, they could join the bad guys, if the players are so inclined, or form their own splinter group. There are many parts of the world that lie unclaimed by modern technology that would fall to a new Cortez and his followers.

The feel of such a game would be whatever the group likes. However, the books are definitely gritty and realistic. A creative GM could twist the story a little and add elements of the supernatural to give a different feel. Adventurers could match their firepower and wits against the magic of the early Cabal, or battle a Shaman and his spirits over a powerful artifact or important trade concession. The whole event that brought Nantucket back in time could be the center of a secret history campaign. Was there someone on Nantucket when it was transported that knows the answers? Did a group there know too much and cause their enemies to banish the island as part of a greater game? Perhaps it is the characters themselves.

The other way in which these books will help the roleplayer is by being a great illustration of how world building is done. Stirling is obviously very knowledgeable and includes a lot of information in throwaway lines here and there. Together these add up to a lot of facts about history, war, economics, manufacturing, and other subjects. These are easily taken out of this context and used elsewhere.

GMs and players interested in a campaign where they build up a primitive area to a higher tech level will see this illustrated here in some detail. Those who would like to have a hand in roleplaying in the setting realistically would be well served to use these books as a reference. The problem of scrounging among what is available to make the tools to make the tools is seen. The often undealt with issue of cultural dilution becomes a real problem. The Nantucketers need far more workers than they have; how many can they take in before the group loses what it is that makes them who they are?

In short, the Nantucket Trilogy by S.M. Stirling would be a very useful source for anyone interested in roleplaying crosstime or dimension campaigns.

--*Stephen Coney*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



A Polyphony of Mermaids

"[S]he pines sometimes, I think, for her great grey ocean. I hate to keep her penned up in this tank, but I know of nowhere else to put her. I think I shall turn her loose some day when we are showing along the seacoast. . . . And I shall stand there . . . waist-deep in the water, mourning over the beauty I have just let slip away from me, mourning over the beauty I could touch and see but never completely comprehend"

-- Dr. Lao, in *The Circus of Dr. Lao*, by Charles Finney

In April of 1964, the Situationist "anti-artist" Jørgen Nash cut off the head of Copenhagen's most beloved statue, Edvard Eriksen's 1913 "Little Mermaid." The "who" of it remained unclear until his 1997 confession; the "why" remains murky today. Her head was never recovered, and had to be replaced. And it gets worse -- in 1984 two drunks cut off her right arm, on Epiphany of 1990 she again suffered decapitation, and on September 11, 2003, she was blown off her stone perch with explosives. What is the rage that swirls, like the whirlpool of Charybdis, around this most iconic of all mermaids? Another dip into the waters of the bestiary, into the ocean of strangeness. Let's find out.

"The mermaid is a sea beast wonderly shapen, and draweth shipmen to peril by sweetness of song . . . And Physiologus saith it is a beast of the sea, wonderly shapen as a maid from the navel upward and a fish from the navel downward, and this wonderful beast is glad and merry in tempest, and sad and heavy in fair weather."

-- Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things* (c. 1240)

That, intriguingly enough, is the earliest unambiguous written description of a mermaid, as such, that I can find. There are plenty of pictures of fish-tailed beings predating the 13th century, of course, going back to our old acquaintance [Oannes](#) in Babylonia around 1600 B.C. By the Middle Assyrian Kingdom a few centuries later, fish-people had become generic, with the wonderful appellation *kulullu*. The fish-tailed Philistine goddess [Derceto](#) made quite an impression on Greek visitors to Syria, and caused a wave of depictions of Aphrodite with a fish tail; Greek depictions of the Tritons as fish-tailed go back to the 6th century B.C. or so. One occasionally reads hints in Ovid or other classical writers of fish-tailed beings of one or another sort, and Pliny describes Nereids as fish-people, albeit green and scaly all over. But the word "mermaid" is a medieval one (despite the Anglo-Saxon *merewif* or "sea witch") coming from the French *mer*, meaning "sea," and so is the concept.

Said concept includes not just the upper body of a beautiful woman and the lower body of a fish. The mermaid has specific attributes, both physical and moral. She has long hair, which she combs or examines in a [mirror](#) or both. She tempts sailors, either by her beauty or by her cries. And should they yield to such temptation, she and her fellow mermaids "ravisheth" them, and once the fun of that wears off, "she slayeth him and eateth his flesh." Mermaids can predict the weather, and their moods mirror it (happy in storms, sad in calms), and they lure ships into squalls to destroy them. And thus, says the Church triumphant, they represent temptation and lust. Or at the very least, the importance of paying attention to the sails and winds instead of thinking about girls.

"This morning, one of our companie looking over board saw a mermaid, and calling up some of the companie to see her, one more came up, and by that time shee was close to the ship's side, looking earnestly upon the men: a little after, a Sea came and overturned her: From the Navill upward, her backe and breasts were like a woman's . . . her body as big as one of us; her skin very white; and long haire hanging down behinde, of colour blacke; in her going down they saw her tayle, which was like the tayle of a Porposse, and speckled like a Macrell."

-- entry in the log of Henry Hudson, June 15, 1608

But the Church had more than moral example on its side. It had first-hand testimony, and the occasional captive. Mermaid encounters go back to the 6th century, and even before -- Pliny describes Nereids seen off Cadiz in the era of Tiberius Caesar. We have three medieval sightings in Ireland (and two captured in 1018 alone), a shipful of Crusaders subjected to merfolk "jeering" them in the Bay of Biscay in 1147, a web-fingered mermaid spotted off Greenland in the same century, and so forth. There are first-hand reports from authorities like Columbus (who saw mermaids in 1493), Ambrose Pare (in Rome in 1523), and Henry Hudson's 1608 sighting noted above. Captain John Smith saw a mermaid in 1614 and almost fell in love despite her ears being "a little too long" and large eyes "rather too round." Scotland had a rash of mermaid sightings in the 19th century -- at Caithness in 1809, Kintyre in 1811, Port Gordon and

Banff in 1814, Benbecula in 1830, the Isle of Yell in 1833, and Cruden Bay in 1870. A Dr. Chisolm reports mermaids from the Caribbean in 1797, and one Jacinto Fetalvero admits to a mermaid encounter in the Philippines in 1978.

"It's a mermaid!" Conseil exclaimed. 'With all due respect to Monsieur, it's an actual mermaid!' That word 'mermaid' put me back on track, and I realized that the animal belonged to that species of marine creatures that legends have turned into mermaids, half woman, half fish. 'No,' I told Conseil, 'that's no mermaid, it's an unusual creature of which only a few specimens are left in the Red Sea. That's a dugong.' 'Order Sirenia, group Pisciforma, subclass Monodelphia, class Mammalia, branch Vertebrata,' Conseil replied. And when Conseil has spoken, there's nothing else to be said."

-- Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*

The overwhelming consensus among serious naturalists is that such mermaid sightings are mostly sightings of manatees or dugongs, two tropical species of water-mammals that can -- in fog, at night, from a distance -- occasionally resemble a dumpy bald mermaid with flippers. You will perhaps have noted that an awful lot of those mermaid sightings come from non-tropical waters blissfully free of manatees or dugongs, to which objection serious naturalists mutter something about "monk seals" or "Steller's sea cow" and change the subject. The notion that a Scottish fisherman doesn't know a seal from a mermaid is perhaps less likely than the notion of mermaids. The Roman skeptic Lucretius had a far better explanation: mermaids come from "films" of fish and maidens floating in the air, or in other words, people see weird stuff and make up stories about it. In "The Prevalence of Mermaids," Avram Davidson makes an excellent point that feral children found near water were likely to be recorded as "mermaids" -- a surprising number of mermaid sightings describe the mermaid as "identical to a human" -- but doesn't quite let us know where he thinks the notion of mermaids came from in the first place. Like Lucretius, I'm inclined to think the notion came from the poetic imagination.

*"First to the Sirens ye shall come, that taint
The minds of all men, whom they can acquaint
With their attractions. . . .
And then observe: They sit amidst a mead,
And round about it runs a hedge or wall
Of dead men's bones, their wither'd skins and all."*
-- Homer, *Odyssey*, Book XII (tr. George Chapman)

And specifically, it seems to have come in no small part from Homer's poetic imagination, although his Sirens are not described as fish-tailed, or anything-tailed. In fact, in Apollonius' *Argonautika*, and in a staggering number of Greek vases and paintings, the Sirens are depicted as *bird*-women, which makes sense once you realize that their key feature is their song, not their oceanic habitat. The Sirens, whose name comes from *seirao*, "to bind," were daughters of the river-god Achelous and one of the Muses (stories vary), and we can already see the fish-tails coming back, can't we? And indeed when we look on those handy vases, we see Achelous sporting a long, sea-monster tail (and the horns of a bull, to screw things up further). Indeed, the word *sirene* or its cognates is also used in most Romance languages for mermaids as well. The two are, at the very least, kissing cousins. The depictions of Sirens in bestiaries and art can be visibly caught between bird- and fish-form in the 12th-century bestiary translated by T.H. White, where the entry on "Sirens" describes them as fish-tailed alongside an illustration showing a Siren possessing both wings and fish-tails.

The Sirens, regardless of parentage and appendage, sat on rocky islands and sang, and their songs lured sailors to their deaths in virtually all known cases. Only two heroes got past the Sirens with their ships intact. Orpheus saved the Argonauts by singing a song still more beautiful and enchanting, drowning out the Sirens' song. And Odysseus, by stopping his crew's ears with wax and chaining himself to the mast, got his ship past the Sirens' rocks and heard their song on the way by. Enraged by this defeat, later authors said, the Sirens threw themselves off their cliffs and into the waters below to drown -- or, perchance, to become mermaids.

*"The doomed in his drifting shallop,
Is tranced with the sad sweet tone,
He sees not the yawing breakers,
He sees but the maid alone:*

*The pitiless billows engulf him!
So perish sailor and bark;
And this, with her baleful singing,
Is the Lorelei's gruesome work."*
-- Heinrich Heine, "The Lorelei" (tr. Mark Twain)

And from "drowned women" the road back to mermaids is straighter than you might think. The clearest case is Liban, a pagan girl drowned in Ireland who became a mermaid (or technically a merrow, from the Gaelic *muir-oigh* or "sea maid") until she was converted by St. Comgall. Jenny Greenteeth, Peg Powler, and other river-spirits have similar origins -- girls drowned who become underwater temptresses and destroyers. Likewise, the nixie of Germanic lore, the Russian rusalka, and the Scandinavian havfrau. In a slight variant, the Norse goddess Ran catches drowned men in [her net](#) beneath the sea. The combination of water, death, and haunting song leads us likewise to the *bean sidhe*, or banshee, and to her Mexican cousin [La Llorona](#), who weeps by the water for her drowned children. In other versions of the story, the mermaid emerges onto the land to seize a mate -- usually by her beauty. The French mermaid Melusine married Raymond of Poitou (shades of the oceanic Quinotaur spawning the Merovingians) but the marriage fell apart for the standard fairy-tale reason (a broken promise, in this case not to spy on her in her bath). Looked at through this lens, the Lady of the Lake has some mermaid features, too. She raised the infant Lancelot, who would destroy the Round Table, and when she gave Arthur Excalibur she demanded the head of Sir Balin in exchange.

*"We come from the mind, Of humankind,
Which was late so dusk, and obscene, and blind;
Now 't is an ocean, Of clear emotion,
A heaven of serene and mighty motion . . .*

*From the dim recesses, Of woven caresses,
Where lovers catch ye by your loose tresses;
From the azure isles, Where sweet Wisdom smiles,
Delaying your ships with her siren wiles."*
-- Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, IV:93-110

This bargain -- death by water in exchange for power -- was the bargain of the Sirens. Odysseus, you'll recall, wanted to hear the Sirens sing, and they promised to reveal to him the knowledge of the gods, "the sorrows of the Argives and Trojans." Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Pliny's sources saw "Nereids" off the coast of Spain, spent his last decade on Capri drowning in sexual perversion and books of forbidden lore, the provinces of the mermaids. You think that's a stretch? Well, Capri was originally named Leucosia -- which, as it turns out, was the name of one of the Sirens. Yes, Capri was the original Siren rock, but it gets better. At the sordid and sorcerous banquets of his debauched retirement Tiberius habitually asked his guests riddles, such as "What name did Achilles take when he hid among the women?" and "What song did the Sirens sing?" Tiberius was after something; after the power of the mermaids.

We know the song the Sirens sang, because Odysseus tells us -- the song of the sorrows of the Greeks and Trojans, in other words, the *Iliad*. And Odysseus bore that song away from them, stealing it from them as Prometheus stole fire from the gods. At that point, the Sirens fling themselves into the ocean and drown, becoming mermaids. Odysseus' capture of the song changes them -- a phase change from air (the realm of the [superconscious](#), the unimaginable) to the sea (Jung's unconscious, the universal deep). In a different myth, the Sirens challenge the Muses to a singing contest, and when they lose, the Muses pluck their feathers and hurl them into the sea -- another sort of phase change. Similarly the Irish legends of St. Patrick changing the recalcitrant pagan women (worshipers of the raven-goddess Morrigan?) into mermaids point to such an alteration. Ovid's Nereids, as it happens, are born from the burning timbers of Aeneas' ships, destroyed off Capri, I note smugly. But [Cybele](#) (you knew she was coming, didn't you?) saved her sacred trees, turning them to water-women. Another shift, likewise associated with the Trojan War, the first song of the West.

*"I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think that they will sing to me.*

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves

*Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.*

*We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown."*
-- T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

Are mermaids, then, the embodiments of song, the core beings of the cantosphere that manifests in the oceans around us, in the great sea of stories? Perhaps some were originally women sacrificed to the water, like Iphigineia at Aulis, whose death begins the Trojan War. Perhaps [Poe](#) was more right than he knew when he insisted that all great stories, at their heart, must be about the death of a woman. (Poe, of course, thought his tale "Ligeia" to be his best -- and Ligeia was, of course, the name of a Siren.) Perhaps such deaths, like that of Liban in Ireland, served as the seed pearls around which the "sea-change into something rich and strange" occurred, around which Lucretius' "films" can wind themselves. The selfhood of the drowned girl becomes the core of the living poem, and the mermaids propagate by driving stories themselves (note Lancelot, surrounded by women and water) or by seducing poets. [Swinburne](#), Byron, and Yeats, for example, all obsessed with the sea and swimming. And as mermaids will, they devour their lovers -- [Shelley](#) drowned in the Gulf of Spezia, Li Po fell into the Yangtze river, Hart Crane jumped into John Smith's Caribbean, Virginia Woolf walked into the waves. Sometimes, the mad and the drunken -- poets in potentia -- fight back, as in Copenhagen, but their vandalism is washed away. The song drains the singer and moves on, and the uncaring mermaids comb their hair.

Differences Big and Small

by Heather Barnhorst

It is once again the season of the Grinch, a time when I find myself reflecting on the achievements of my life and my expectations for the upcoming year. Some of my friends tell me that I've reached middle age and I'll leave you to decide what kind of friends delight in telling you these kinds of unpleasant truths. Their logic goes, "You are 41, you've probably reached the halfway point in your life -- you are middle aged." My logic says that I don't plan to die before I reach 100. I have found, though, that my Forties are more of a time for contemplation upon the direction of my life than my Go-Go Thirties ever were. Reaching a birthday that might throw you into that category of over-the-hillness does make you ponder your personal history.

In all of this thinking and pondering and mulling over, I have to come to the conclusion that my number one achievement, at least business-wise, is that I manage a game store. I will further admit that many people would not consider managing a game store to be a career move. It is something more akin to marking time until a better gig presents itself, a job taken while you attend college or to supplement an income. I have to tell you that no matter how much any of you believes that owning a game store is the coolest job in the world and no matter how many retailers will tell you that what they do is important because they sell "fun," the sad fact of the matter is that most people do not consider running a game store to be an adult occupation. I'm not sure that I believe it to be an adult occupation.

I attended my husband's company's Christmas Party last Friday evening. His VP hosted this Christmas soiree at his beautiful, million-dollar house located in the same gated community that hosts the International here in Denver every August. There was valet parking and catering and open bars located throughout the house. Most of the people I mingled with (all right, networked with) were corporate flunkies being paid three times as much as I make in a year. Nice corporate flunkies, I should hasten to add, but they surely did not know what to make of my occupation.

"A game store? How nice for you. So you sell . . .?"

"Have you ever heard of *Dungeons & Dragons*? Or toy soldiers?"

"You do that? Exactly what is that?"

"I sell board games, too. You know *Scrabble* and *Monopoly*?"

"Sure. I played those when I was a kid." Whether they were Tony the Marketing Analyst or John the Vikings Fan and Associate VP or Marissa the Brand Manager, they would wander off looking for better fodder to further their careers.

I did bond with Jack, a lawyer and the new boyfriend of my husband's manager. We geeked over *Law & Order*. He works in the oil and petroleum business. He does important things for important clients who pay him bucketloads of money. I sell *Yu-Gi-Oh!* to eight-year-olds who do not pay me bucketloads of money.

This point in my narrative is probably a good time for me to admit to being a trifle feminine -- I've always possessed a secret, envious desire to work a job that requires that I wear beautiful clothing as well as do good in the world. I am known for taking a great many pairs of shoes when I attend industry trade shows, but shoes doth not make complete outfits that can be worn to the office on a daily basis. The sad fact of the matter is that while I wear the titles of manager and buyer at the store, I am expected to wear many more invisible hats. I'm the person who receives the shipments (number one reason for not wearing nice clothing, because FedEx will deliver your boxes with the maximum amount of grime attached), I'm the janitor (yes, I've cleaned baby vomit from the carpet), also the publications manager (someone has to make the signs and print the monthly schedule of events), clerical help, event manager, and customer service representative. I talk to moms about games and I tell small children to stop running in the store. Yet the truth is that there are parts of me that love every aspect of this job.

The question I keep asking myself, though, is how important is this job that I do. I mean in the grand scheme of things.

How do I change the world? How do I contribute to the betterment of humanity? Some people would tell you that the minute kindnesses, the incremental movement toward connection are what continue to buoy us all up. Some people would tell you that this worldview is a steaming pile of horse manure. I yo-yo between the two positions depending on how trying my Best Customers have managed to be on any given day.

There are other people who will tell you that games are important because they express the human desire for expression. That each book, each collection of paper and ink and plastic, is an attempt towards some truth that the creator understands and needs to transmit to the rest of us. Most publishers created their first game out of pure love. Most retailers carry games not because they love retailing but because they adore games and they cannot imagine that any other line of work could make them happier.

Let's face it folks, games really are just bits of nothingness wrapped in pretty pictures. They don't create world peace. They don't solve the issues of hunger and disease or how to protect our fellow human beings from the ravages of natural disasters. If I, the purveyor of this paper crack am engaged in meaningless activity at least I can say that I make my living off of it. You, my friends, play them. Your involvement in terms of creating a worthwhile life could be considered highly suspect.

Games do not make a difference in this world.

Or do they?

I had a friend who went into the hospital rather suddenly and wound up staying there for a week. Normally someone who inhabits a hospital bed for that long is gravely ill and wishes for nothing more than to rest while scads of concerned people take care of him. My friend was indeed seriously unwell. His blood pressure spiked so high that several blood vessels in his eye popped and he lost part of his eyesight. He could have stroked out any minute but he didn't feel sick. Hospitals are fairly faceless affairs where everything and everyone become part of the automated system and there he was stuck in voluntary confinement bored out of his mind while nurses and nutritionists and doctors ferried him from one appointment to another like a piece of inventory that needed to be merchandised properly. I took pity on him and gathered up the games that I thought he would like and which didn't take a lot of room to play and I visited with him several times. For three or four hours each day, we played Cribbage and Tsuro and Quiddler and any number of other pleasant, social games. I doubt that my visits changed his life but I don't question that those games helped him to pass some of his time more pleasantly.

One of my most treasured memories. Right after 9-11, a number of gaming organizations and retailers in the Denver area decided to hold an auction in support of the Port Authority victims of the attack. Attactix wound up serving as the receiving and processing center for the donations. We put out flyers announcing the event and soliciting donations in all the participating stores and we contacted publishers begging for whatever they could send. The game convention organization that I volunteered with convinced one of our host hotels to provide us space for the auction. Everyone pulled together to create an event within the very short time of three weeks. I remember worrying that the gamers would not respond and that all that effort made by so many people would not make a difference. I remember standing in that hotel ballroom as I realized that the gamers were digging deep into their pockets to help. I remember crying. We raised thousands of dollars and I've never been prouder of my community as I was then.

Many other game industry professionals have embarked on similar projects. Steve Creech recently posted to an industry forum information about a fundraiser called Project: Jamaica. Get this -- this organization needs only \$4000 to build a library in Jamaica. He asked for retailers to send overstock books to help fill the library. Many retailers house collection cans for foodbanks or sponsor blood drives or raise funds because their Best Customer's child has brain cancer.

What I am saying is that retailers can make a difference when we recognize our connections to our community. We are not the order taker in the drive thru at the local burger joint. We are not the cashier at the Big Box retailer down the street. We are people who encounter you every day of our lives. We work hard learning about you so that we can understand your preferences and find you the games that you want. Some retailers revel in these opportunities while others feel that they impose unfair duties on them. I leave you to surmise which ones survive.

Is community that important? Don't we all crave a Cheers for our own? A place where everybody knows our name? Where there is a seat reserved just for us and everyone is happy to see us? Where people care about our fate? Absolutely. And having a place like that can change a person's life. Finding that acceptance can become meaningful to people who have been outsiders all their lives or who suddenly experience overwhelming crisis. It is what you are so good at -- accepting people despite their race, class, gender, abilities or age. You simply require enough intellect to understand the rules, and [sometimes not even that](#). Game stores are often sanctuaries and safe havens and spots of joy in lives suddenly filled with burdens. It is here, in this space, that my Best Customers can relax and talk about a hobby that gives them delight. Retailers are the hubs of your community. We listen, we synthesize, we connect, we zig so that someone doesn't zag out of control. Not a part of our job description but perhaps this connection is what draws us into this profession. When we see ourselves as important parts of the community (no matter how small) then we make differences in ourselves and in the lives of our customers.

Perhaps not everyone cares about achieving the worthwhile, and perhaps these matters seem trivial to the non-gamers who never darken our doorways, but I suspect that most game retailers do care. Perhaps our community is no different than the RC community or the model-train community or the cookie-cutter-collectors community. Perhaps the activity that brings us joy isn't the point, perhaps it is the community that we create that makes the difference in our lives. We live in a small industry where many of us know each other by first names. We can make a difference. These changes in each other's lives may not be earth-shattering but perhaps they don't need to be.

As I leave the Season of Thanksgiving, move through the Season of Giving and look toward the Season of Resolution, perhaps I should not be so worried about my achievements. Perhaps I should better appreciate the community that we have all found and wish you all the joy that you have brought me.

From the bottom of my heart, Happy Holidays to you all.

Agricultural Calendar

by S.E. Mortimer

Introduction

Although there is plenty of literature available on the importance of the peasantry in medieval society, it is surprising how little regard the typical roleplayer gives them. Considering that up to 90% of the population was directly involved in agriculture, one should expect almost every encounter the PCs have in a low-tech world to be related to this enterprise in some way. However, it is understandable why most GMs place little emphasis on the agricultural nature of their game world. Consider a random encounter table: "Roll the dice; okay, you encounter . . . a farmer." A little later. "Roll again . . . oh, another farmer." Repeat *ad infinitum*.

However, with a little imagination and the dismantling of some stereotypes, one would be surprised how rich and varied these encounters can actually be. There is no reason why the typical roleplaying staples of warfare and political intrigue could not be set aside for a few sessions for a diversion into the rural countryside where one might encounter anything from an obscure and entertaining local holiday celebration to the devastation and suffering caused by famine or excessive taxation. This work is designed to be used in conjunction with ["Tilting at Windmills,"](#) ["Horse Sense,"](#) and ["On Inns, Taverns, and Alehouses"](#) to create a more complete picture of rural life in low tech societies.

The Working Day

Contrary to popular opinion, the medieval peasant did not work constantly from dawn to dusk. He might have been poor, but he seems to have had a lot of leisure time. Even the serf, who was considered particularly poorly treated, only needed to work half a day (around five hours) to fulfill his feudal labor obligations. Manorial records indicate that if a serf actually worked for a full day, then it was counted as two days' labor. During summer, a day in England or northern Europe might last 16 hours, but not all of this was spent working. The peasant had many breaks during the day, including an extended nap in the afternoon. It has been calculated that the average amount of work done each day was between seven and nine hours, but it depends on the time of the year. A peasant might work from dawn till dusk during peak times such as planting and harvest, but only work till noon during slacker times.

Also, workers celebrated a number of holidays each year -- both religious ones and local traditions. England had the longest work year, with rest days and holidays taking up about four months each year. Spanish peasants seem to have had the easiest life, with around five months of holidays each year. During times of labor shortages (after the Black Death, for instance), higher wages meant that peasants could (and often did) work significantly less time for the same amount of income. One estimate indicates that during these times peasants worked as little as 120 days per year. Given the choice of working less hours or earning a higher income, it seems that many peasants chose to have more leisure time. This work ethic would be completely alien to many members of today's post-industrial revolution workforce.

A Sample Calendar

Even if the players don't want to bother with the mundane day-to-day activities of a medieval village, it is important to know what is happening at any particular time of the year. If the PCs arrive in town for a night of drinking and debauchery only to discover that the inhabitants are observing a particularly solemn religious holiday, then there would be serious repercussions if the heroes attempted any frivolity. The travelers might urgently need a hireling only to discover that every able-bodied person is bringing in the harvest and nobody will be available for several days. What will the players do if, just prior to the harvest, they need to buy some food only to find that, in every village, food stores have run too low for any to be spared? Perhaps one of the PCs has a debt he can't settle -- it might be best to skip town before it fell due on Michaelmas.

What follows is a brief discussion of the major events of the agricultural year along with the most common religious holidays and festivals. On top of these holidays are other rest days including the sabbath (every Sunday) and other, sometimes quite bizarre, local traditions. There are also rest days for special occasions such as weddings and funerals. The typical medieval peasant combined hard work with a good deal of recreation. During the Reformation, many of the Saints' Days were gradually whittled away until only the most sacred (such as Christmas and Easter) remained to be celebrated in more modern times. The following calendar is split into seasons so that the GM can use it even if his game world doesn't follow the Medieval European calendar. Most holidays can be categorized into one of two types. They are either feastdays, which involve lots of eating, drinking and merrimaking; or they are solemn days of religious observance, involving vigil, fasting, and introspection.

Winter

Plough Monday. Celebrated on the first Monday after Twelfth Night (January 6th). This holiday marks the beginning of the working year following the Christmas break. Ploughmen ("plough bullockers") kept "plough lights" burning in front of the church. All the ploughs were blessed and decorated before being dragged through the streets by cheering villagers. During this procession, money was collected for the support of the plough lights. Ale was drunk to the success of the coming year's harvest.

Work began the following day. It included clearing ditches; fertilizing the soil (plowing under burnt weeds and spreading manure); cutting wood; and breeding sows. Lambing sometimes begins in late January.

Candlemas (February 2nd). Also known as the "Festival of Lights." This holiday commemorates the ritual purification of the Virgin Mary 40 days after the birth of her son. In Jewish tradition a woman was considered unclean after giving birth and could not enter a temple until she was purified. The holiday was called "Candlemas" because this was the day in which the annual supply of beeswax candles for the church was blessed. This was a solemn religious occasion involving mass and a procession.

St. Valentines' Day sometimes gets combined with Candlemas due to the old calendar and all of the haphazard rearranging to which it was subjected. St. Valentine's Day (February 14th) was celebrated similar to today (though with less commercialization) and there was much foolery.

February work included additional fertilizing (adding chalk, lime, and more manure); pruning trees, vines, and hedges; mending fences, etc. Lambing continues and calving begins.

Spring

In March, as soon as the ground has thawed enough, ploughing begins. Calving continues.

Shrove Tuesday. Also called *Shrovetide*, it occurs exactly 41 days before Easter. It involves feasting and over-indulgence before Lent -- the Church's most solemn period of fasting. Some called it "Fat Tuesday" because all meat and animal products had to be eaten before sundown (Lent began that night).

Ash Wednesday occurs 40 days before Easter and marks the beginning of *Lent*. This is a 40-day period of fasting in which no meat other than fish was to be eaten. The faithful were encouraged to go even further in their abstention. Lent was the most important period in the medieval church -- a time for introspection and acts of piety. Traditionally, palms left over from the last Palm Sunday were burnt to produce the ash which the priest used to mark each parishioner with the sign of the cross. No marriages could take place during Lent without special dispensation.

Lady Day (March 25th). Commemorates the announcement of the Incarnation made by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary.

After Lady Day, work begins in the fields in earnest. Spring crops (barley, oats, peas, beans and vetches) are sown in the recently ploughed fields. Children use slings to defend the newly sown seed from birds. Onions, leeks, hemp, and flax are planted in household vegetable plots. Calves are weaned and dairy work gets underway. Farrowing (birthing of

pigs) begins.

Palm Sunday (seven days before Easter). A solemn occasion where parishioners would bring "palm leaves" (usually willow, box, or yew) or rushes into the church in honor of Christ's procession into Jerusalem.

Maundy Thursday (four days before Easter). Great acts of charity were often done on this day, and a special Mass was held where all the candles were symbolically extinguished one by one during the liturgy to symbolise the coming darkness of the Crucifixion.

Good Friday (three days before Easter). This commemorates the day that Christ was crucified on the cross. Parishioners follow the custom of "creeping to the cross" where they approach a special cross barefoot or on their knees to kiss its base. One of the Hosts consecrated the night before is then placed, along with this cross, in a special sepulchre in the north side of the church, and a sentry stands guard until Easter morning.

Easter Sunday. Commemorates the day of Christ's resurrection. The calculation of the date of Easter has been a source of much contention within the early Church, but Roman Catholics celebrate it on Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox (between March 22nd and April 25th).

Hock Monday (Monday after Easter). The following weeks are a time of great merriment. Lent is past and the toil of planting is over. On Hock Monday the young women of the parish would capture young men on the streets and refuse to release them until a small "ransom" was paid into parish funds. On the following day, Hock Tuesday, the custom was reversed and the men had their revenge.

St Mark's Day (April 25th). The Eve of St. Mark (April 24th) was a holiday in which many divinations were performed by rural folk. It was an ancient pagan tradition.

May Eve (April 30th): Also known as *Walpurgisnacht*. People light bonfires and leap through the flames in ceremonies that predate Christianity. Celebrations continue into *May Day* (May 1st) which is the Festival of the Apostles Saint Philip and Saint Jacob. This holiday dates back to pagan times when *Beltane* was celebrated. May Poles are erected, hawthorn blossoms are gathered, and there is a day of feasting and merriment.

Rogation Sunday (Five weeks after Easter). The parish priest, along with his parishioners, would "beat the bounds" -- walking around the boundaries of the parish, accompanied by bells, offering prayers to protect the crops from various disasters; a heavy session of communal drinking usually followed. The following Thursday was called Ascension Day.

Whitsunday (Seven weeks after Easter). This solemn occasion was also called *Pentecost*. A vigil was kept the night before followed by a day of fasting.

Whitsuntide (the following three days after Whitsunday). Also known as the Days of Solemnity.

In May, the winter crop is weeded; thatched roofs are maintained; vegetables like carrot, cabbage, and beets are planted. Cows come back into full milk as they graze more on pasture and less on winter fodder.

Summer

In June, sheep are washed and sheared. In the meadow, hay begins to be mowed with long-handled scythes -- it is a communal activity. Weeding is performed between the days of haymaking and grain harvest. The second ploughing of the fallow field(s) was performed.

Corpus Christi Festival (12 weeks after Easter). A traditional time for the presentation of pageants and plays commemorating the life of Christ and sponsored by town guilds. The occasion focuses on the consecrated Host of the Mass.

Midsummer (June 24th). Also known as the Feast of St. John the Baptist. Huge bonfires are popular and it was common to stay up all night on Midsummer Night's Eve. There are military parades, civic processions, and many fairs.

Wrestling and races (including gambling on these events) are also popular.

Hay continues to be mowed in July, and livestock are not permitted to graze on the meadow for one month after haymaking to allow the grass time to recover; flax and hemp are harvested. July was known as the "hungry month" when grain stores were at their lowest, awaiting the coming harvest.

In August, harvesting of the winter grain (wheat and rye) is performed; straw is gathered; livestock is released to graze upon the stubble; turnips are planted.

Feast of St. Peter (August 1st). Commemorates the birth of St. Peter. A day of feasting and merrymaking.

Lammas (August 2nd). The Festival of the First Harvest. Loaves made from the first bushel of wheat to be harvested are consecrated in church. A traditional time for great fairs and celebration.

St. Laurence's Day (August 10th). A solemn day of vigil.

Assumption Day (August 15th). The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A vigil was often held on the Eve of Assumption Day. It commemorates the reception of the Virgin Mary into Heaven. Often this was also a harvest festival, providing relief from hard labor during the harvest. Morality and mystery plays were performed.

Feast of St. Paul (August 30th). Commemorates the birth of St. Paul. A day of feasting and merrymaking.

Autumn

Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary (September 7th). Commemorates the birth of the Virgin Mary.

Holy Rood Day (September 14th). Also called Holy Cross Day -- the Festival of the Exultation of the Holy Cross. A solemn day of fasting. It was traditional to harvest nuts on this day.

Mabon (September 21st). The Autumnal equinox is the traditional time of the Second Harvest -- the harvesting of Spring grain, although this harvest usually begins earlier. It is also the transitional day between light and dark -- from now on, days get shorter and darker.

Michaelmas (September 29th). The Feast of St. Michael. The first day of the financial year and the day that many debts, rents, and taxes are due.

In September the Spring grain is harvested; cattle is bred; the winter grain field is ploughed; winter grain is sown (wheat and rye); fruit and berries are harvested; beans and peascods are dried for storage over winter; excess produce is taken to market. Threshing and winnowing of grain begins and continues through to the winter months. Grain is milled when necessary.

In October the rest of the winter grain is sown; grapes are harvested and wine is produced; sheep are bred; pigs forage in the woods for acorns and beechnuts (called pannaging). Wheat stubble was gathered and mixed with hay for winter fodder. The third and final ploughing of the fallow field(s) was performed. Threshing and winnowing continues.

All Hallows' Eve (October 31st). Hallowe'en is the night when ghosts and evil spirits haunt the living. A vigil is held all night.

Feast of All Saints (November 1st). This holiday dates back to pagan times when Samhain was celebrated. It is the time of the Final Harvest. All surplus animals were slaughtered for winter. Traditionally this was the Festival of the Dead, when deceased ancestors were remembered.

St. Martin's Day (November 11th). *Martinmas* was another traditional date for the slaughter of animals. The rest of the livestock was brought in from pasture and stalled in barns. Poorer peasants kept animals in their homes over winter for warmth. This is the traditional date for beginning (and ending) contracts with hired help.

Advent begins after Martinmas. This is a solemn 40-day period of introspection and fasting similar to Lent but not usually as strict.

St. Catherine's Day (November 25th). A very popular feast day in which women performed various obscure rituals to predict the name of their future husband.

In November pigs continue to forage in the woods; firewood is gathered; reeds and sedges are cut and dried for thatching; bracken is gathered for winter bedding for livestock; threshing and winnowing continues.

In December pigs are slaughtered and meat is salted; any remaining grain is processed. Most labor is now performed indoors -- women spin and weave, men perform handicrafts. Other winter work includes performing maintenance, caring for livestock, and carefully stockpiling manure from animal stalls to be used as fertilizer.

St Nicholas' Day (December 6th). A day of role reversal in the schools. One of the boys would be elected Bishop and he would preside over a court of misrule and mayhem.

Yule (December 20th). The Winter Solstice. The main festival occurs on this day, but celebrations continue until Twelfth Night (January 6th).

Christmas (December 25th). The Nativity of Christ commemorates the birth of Jesus. A vigil is held the night before (Christmas Eve).

St. Stephen's Day (December 26th). A day of role reversal for lords and servants. Those in service receive their yearly gift of clothing or livery.

Roleplaying Suggestions

- The lord has taken most of the men of the village with him on a summer campaign and has not returned in time for harvesting. The women and remaining men are working long hours but will not get the majority of the crop harvested in time.
- A distant noble has decided to spend the winter with part of his army in this village. All his men require billets among the local residences and the inn has been commandeered for the noble's personal use. Particularly honorable nobles might pay adequate compensation, but most won't. If you have a problem with that, go complain to the King.
- During the sowing of crops, children use slings to keep marauding birds (crows, etc.) from eating the freshly sown seed. However, it is prohibited to kill the lord's doves, and these nuisances regularly flock to the fields at this time of the year, causing much hostility among the peasantry. Unfortunately, a young boy has accidentally killed one of these doves and is being taken before the lord for trial. He is likely to impose a penalty that the child's parents cannot afford.
- It is illegal to gather firewood for sale (it is only permitted for personal use) but it doesn't stop people from trying. The lord has caught one person too many and has decided to make an example of her.
- A great evil has possessed the village. Ever since the last harvest, people have become possessed by demons. Symptoms include hallucinations, convulsions, and sensations of excruciating pain or burning. An old woman is being accused of witchcraft. A scientifically minded PC might trace the "demonic influence" to the grain stores. Some of the rye is afflicted with a hallucinogenic fungus (ergot).
- Famine! The great fear of every person is upon the land. For the second year in a row there has been a poor harvest, and all will know hardship and starvation this coming year. If the heroes can arrange the importation of foodstuffs from distant markets, they will profit greatly. Keep in mind, however, that few will be able to afford the inflated prices, and the chances of encountering brigands will be high.
- Because of the famine, the number of incidences of poaching in the lord's wood has increased dramatically. The PCs are hired to patrol the woods and keep out riff-raff. They are told to assume that anyone caught in the woods are poachers. The penalty for first time offenders is a heavy fine. Repeat offenders are usually maimed or killed.

For other roleplaying ideas in a rural setting take a look at ["Harvest Festival: When Greenery is more than Scenery."](#)

Further Reading

- Medieval work-week -- http://www.swiss.ai.mit.edu/~rauch/worktime/hours_workweek.html
- Online Calendar of Saints Days -- <http://members.tripod.com/~gunhouse/calendar/home.htm>
- Feasts and Fasts -- http://mw.mcmaster.ca/scriptorium/alice_site/martinmas_more_end.html
- Peasant Life (links) -- <http://www.geocities.com/MedievalWorld/LinksPeasant.html>

Bet On It

for *GURPS*

by Keith MacKenzie

British secret agents in casinos, American secret agents at horse tracks, gunslingers in saloon card games. Gambling has an air of mystery about it and many players have given their characters skill in this area. These rules, presented for *GURPS Fourth Edition*, allow the skill to mean something beyond flavor text. They do not encompass cliché things such as betting everything on one roll of the dice or betting on one's favorite team no matter how poor they play. While the first is a gambit, neither is gambling. Gambling is playing a series of games with the intention of coming out ahead.

Lottery Games

Lottery games are games where gambling skill does not apply. This would include Roulette, Bingo, and the ever popular slot machines. For each hour of gambling, the character determines how much he is willing to lose. With the stake determined, the player then rolls against a 10. The margin of success times 10% of the stake is the profit (the stake is not lost). If the roll failed, the character loses 10% of the stake per point of failure. On a critical failure, the character loses their entire stake, and must make a Will roll. If the Will roll is successful, no further losses occur this hour. If the roll fails, the character loses all currency with him and on a critical failure will lose anything else of value with them, such as jewelry, vehicles, or weapons, if the venue will take them in trade (the character gets no cash value, but some establishments will not accept anything besides cash).

House Games

House games are games where skill comes into play, and the house wins or loses to each player separately. Examples include Blackjack, Craps, Horse Racing, Sports Book, and Video Poker. If the game has a dealer, the dealer will always be the house. The house may have a stake maximum and most tables will have a minimum (usually 10 times the minimum bet, so a \$5 table would require a \$60 stake). As with Lottery games, each player decides his stake for that hour and rolls against his Gambling skill. The House rolls against 14. The player's margin of success minus the house's margin of success times 10% of the player's stake is how much the player wins or loses. The stake is still kept. If the player loses more than 100% of his stake, a Will roll must be made. If it succeeds, only the stake is lost. If the roll fails, all currency the player has is lost; on a critical failure, other items of value are also lost. Sports Book and horse racing may use appropriate skills instead of gambling if they have actual recent experience with all the competitors.

Casino Option: If a player stake is more than the cost of a room, and the player scores a critical success, his room will be free (comped). If a player gets two critical successes in a row or four in an evening, the dealer will be replaced with a ringer (House skill becomes 16) or a cooler might be sent (cancels luck advantage for one hour). If a player gets three critical successes a row or 6 in one night or more than 10 in a week, the gambler will be shown out of the casino and may be beaten. Note that it is better for High skill gamblers to play zero-sum games.

Racing and Sport Book

This is gambling on athletic competition. It is essentially treated as house games except that players may use other appropriate skills, if they can show that a skill is applicable. A gambler who has Riding and has visited the stables and seen all the horses personally could use that skill instead of Gambling. A sports fan with sufficient study of recent games and Strategy: Football could use that skill.

Zero-Sum Games

Zero-Sum games are games where players win or lose among themselves. The house gets nothing (although in many games the house gets an entrance fee). The stake may be set ahead and each player starts with the same amount of money, or may be open to whatever people bring. Poker is the most common game for this sort of gambling, but other games do exist. Billiards also falls into this category, except Hobby: Billiards is used instead of gambling.

If the game has a fixed stake, each player wagers that amount each hour. Each player rolls against his Gambling skill. The margins of success and failure are averaged, and this number is subtracted from the margin of each player. Each player then wins or loses 10% times his adjusted margin of the stake. When a player does not have enough to cover his loss, the players who lose will pay their losses first and then pay extra until all the winners are paid. The winners are paid off in margin order.

Example: Adam, Bennie, Carlos, and Dieter gather for their weekly \$100 stake game. Their skills are all 12. For the first hour their rolls are 5, 10, 11, and 7. Their margins of success are 7, 2, 1, and 5 which average 3.75. Adam wins 7 (his margin of success) 3.75 (average margin of success) $\times 10\% \times \$100 = \$32.50$. Bennie loses \$17.50, Carlos loses \$27.50, and Dieter wins \$12.50. They now have \$132.50, \$82.50, \$72.50, and \$112.50 respectively.

The next hour the stakes are still \$100, and the rolls are 8, 17, 12, and 8. The margins of success are 4, -5, 0, and 4 averaging .75. Adam and Dieter each win \$32.50, Carlos loses \$7.50, and Bennie loses \$57.50. After two hours their individual totals are \$165, \$25, 65, and \$145.

It's now Hour Three, and the rolls are 7, 16, 13, and 6. The margins are 5, -4, -1, and 6, averaging 1.5. Because Bennie will not have enough to cover his loss of \$55, Dieter will collect his \$45 first. Carlos loses \$25 for his roll, and \$25 comes from Bennie's remaining stake, providing Dieter's \$45. This leaves \$5 left over for Adam who still has \$35 coming; Adam's remaining \$30 will be paid by Carlos, because he had the next smallest margin of success. At the end of hour three, Adam has \$205, Bennie has nothing, Carlos has \$5, and Dieter has \$190. If Carlos did not have enough, then Adam would have had to make up the difference, but it would have been to himself.

In a variable stake game, the players with larger stakes will essentially play more hands. Each player's stake is divided by the smallest stake and the player will make that many rolls. Each roll is resolved independently, in the same manner as fixed stake games. If Ernie is staking \$20, Fred is staking 100, and Gregory stakes 60, Ernie will make 1 roll, Fred will make 5 and Gregory will make 3. All nine rolls will be normalized and the payoffs will be relative to Ernie's \$20 stake.

Cheating

Players may cheat if they wish. They should roll each hour before their skill roll against Sleight of Hand (or whatever skill they are using) at -1 per point of Gambling skill adjustment. The cheater may adjust his own skill or another player's, and the adjustment may be made up or down. Other players and the house will roll against perception with a bonus of the same amount. The House has Per 14 at TL5, 16 at TL6, 20 at TL7, and 30 at TL8. The house will also use methods to catch magic or psionics if those things are common in the world. If a cheater is caught, the repercussions range from being thrown out to being killed. If a cheater is raising another player's skill, that player will suffer the same fate. If another player's skill was being lowered, that player will be encouraged by the house to call it a night and his room comped.

Gamblers may wish to pull their punch, or play at a lesser level, either to avoid too many critical successes at table games, as part of an elaborate set-up, or just a hustle. A character pulling his punch must make an Acting ($\frac{1}{4}$ the skill reduction) roll, or the other players or the house will know the player is more skilled than he seems. Critical success and failure are calculated from the played at skill.

Notes

- Bingo is rolled per night or per 3 hours, not per hour.
- Horse Racing is per afternoon or per evening.
- Sports Book assumes bets on multiple events during a day or weekend depending upon the sport.
- In parts of the world, some forms of gambling are illegal or considered immoral. Cheating in these areas will seldom be brought to the attention of the law.

Pyramid Pick

Ars Magica Fifth Edition

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by David Chart with Tom Dowd, Jörg-Peter Friederich, Rich Gentile, Andrew Gronosky, Mark Shirley, Andrew Smith, Kevin Sours, & David Woods

Cover by J. Scott Reeves

Illustrated by J. Scott Reeves with Dave Allsop, Liz Danforth, Brian Dugan, Neil Edwards, Charles Gillespie, Josh Hoops, Eric Hotz, Janine Johnston, Alexis Liosatos, William O'Connor, Dom Reardon, John Scotello, & Jock Simpson

242-Page Full Color Hardback; \$35

When it comes to RPGs that focus on magic, *Ars Magica* has always been at the fore. Originally published by Lion Rampant in 1988, its history found it at White Wolf and associated with the World of Darkness -- particularly *Vampire: The Masquerade* and [Mage: The Ascension](#). More recently it has found a home with Atlas Games.

The publisher heavily supported the *Fourth Edition*, but more recently has published a slimmer *Fifth Edition*. More than a cosmetic makeover, the reworking has been carried out by the game's line editor, David Chart, who is also the author of several well-done campaign supplements for the *d20 System*, including [Splintered Peace](#) and the [Medieval Player's Manual](#).

The setting for *Ars Magica Fifth Edition* remains unchanged -- the Mythic Europe of 1220. This is a version of the Middle Ages in which the Church of Rome still dominates, but in which magic is real, the power of the infernal is very much a dangerous threat, beasts of myth and legend stalk the lands just beyond the bounds of civilisation, and those of the faerie realm dance in the woods or visit man to taunt him. Magic is governed and studied through the Order of Hermes, a centuries-old organization housed in 13 Tribunals across Europe, each cell often acting as a beacon against dogma and superstition.

Likewise the game's style and play remains unchanged. It was innovative in 1988, and for many, the concept of Troupe play is still too radical, asking as it does to play multiple characters. These come in three types: the Magus, the Companion, and the Grog. Magi are the focus of an *Ars Magica* saga, possessing The Gift that enables them to work magic; this marks them not only as a member of the Order of Hermes, but also gives them an unsettling air to others. Yet this emphasis leaves them unskilled elsewhere, which is where Companions come in, providing more generic and social skills. Companions lack The Gift, but skilled roles include the Female Scholar, the Priest, the Rogue, the Witch, and the Knight. Finally, the Grog is the game's equivalent of the Red Shirt and is almost a throwaway character. If he dies, he will be remembered, but survive heroically, and the humble Grog might grow to become a Companion. A player usually controls a Magus, one or more Companions, and any number of Grogs, though not all at the same time (rather, fitting the needs of the campaign).

Mechanically, *Ars Magica* also remains unchanged and employs a roll of 1d10 plus skill and attribute to beat an assigned Ease Factor. It becomes slightly more complex when a situation is stressful, with a greater chance of rolling a Botch, the game's equivalent of a critical failure.

Yet the most obvious change for the *Fifth Edition* is cosmetic. The hardback has been given a makeover, the aim being to make it match its early medieval milieu. Dominated by red and ochre tones, the graphic reworking keeps the text tidy, but many will find much of J. Scott Reeves' similarly colored illustrations little to their liking, and it is fair to say it works on the small scale better than on the large. Fortunately, the rest of the artwork does not suffer from this problem.

The first of the Edition's changes to its concept is a reorganization of the over arching body in *Ars Magica*. The Order of Hermes is organized into 12 houses that define its members' philosophies and areas of study. All but one of the 12, Ex Miscellanea, is descended from the founders who created the Order in the eighth century. The Houses have now been categorized into three groups. The first four can claim to be true lineages, their Magi being trained by someone who was trained by someone and so on, right back to each house's founder. Of the 12 houses, it is not possible to join these four; a Magus must be apprenticed to them. The second four are Mystery Cults, the initiated learning its secrets as they progress; the third four are organized around particular interests. It is possible to join Mystery Cult house or an Interest one if a magus is unhappy with his current house.

The major change to character generation is a simplification of the virtues and flaws, *Ars Magica's* equivalent of advantages and disadvantages. Where they previously assigned a value, now they are simply rated as either major or minor. A reorganization of the system sees the introduction of the Story Flaw, many of which had been virtues. An example of this is Mentor, who will give aid and advice, but can be used by the storyteller to involve the character in a story.

A further story hook is the troupe's covenant -- their base of operations. Outfitted with a library, laboratories, and other resources, it is the equivalent of a character, but designed cooperatively by the players. Again the rules have been simplified, but the age and feel of a covenant elegantly are defined as spring, summer, autumn, or winter.

At the heart of the game lies magic, still working around the combination of Technique and Form, or verb and noun. It's still in Latin to give it that medieval ambience. For example "Creo Ignem" translates as "create fire," and lists several spells from the simple *Palm Of Flame* to the *Ball Of Abysmal Flame*. The long list of spells is tempered with clearly explained rules on how magic works and the types available. As expected, Spontaneous Magic is free form and flexible, but still weak; Formulaic adheres to the lists provided; and Ritual Magic is expensive in terms of effort, time, and resources but is also the most powerful. Further, laboratory use rules enable a Magi to research new spells, as well as adapting others, enchanting items studying, and gain himself a familiar or apprentice. That said, the bestiary lacks the type of animal useful as a familiar.

Besides the dangers of adventuring and magical duels known as the Certamen, in the long term a Magus can suffer from prolonged exposure to magic. Known as Warping, it increases his chances of entering Wizard's Twilight, where in effect a Magus is placed in suspended animation for as short as two minutes or as long as forever. The experience of being in Twilight marks a Magus with increased or decreased knowledge, an extra flaw or virtue, or just a minor scar. Another danger for a Magus is aging, campaign or saga play being measured in seasons or years. This can be staved off with longevity rituals, which also have to be researched. Also rewritten is the game's combat mechanics, still kept simple, as it is not the focus of *Ars Magica*. Combat isn't overly simple, and it also encompasses group combat for the easier handling of Grog.

For running *Ars Magica*, the storyteller is well served by the advice of running Mythic Europe, which can be as historical as the storyteller demands, and on running stories and sagas. In particular, the explanation of group play is well done, which -- supported with nice examples -- should alleviate any worries that both player and GM might have.

This being a new edition means that existing *Ars Magica* players are going to find things that they dislike over previous versions. Such is the nature of the beast, but I cannot be counted among them. Yet what is obvious is that the *Fifth Edition* has been very much streamlined, not necessarily to make things simpler, but instead to enable understanding and accessibility. Yet despite all of these changes, the game remains unchanged either in terms of feel

and setting. The result is not only an improved version for the devoted fan, but also the perfect "jumping on point" for anyone looking for the game in which magic is a mixture of art and science.

--*Matthew Pook*

Holidays: Society's Swiss Army Knives

A couple of weeks ago, I saw an item on [CNN.com](#) that locked up my brain into a bluescreen of death, requiring reinstallation of the Master Brain Record. According to the article, some megachurches would be [closing on Christmas](#). Yes, some large Christ-worshipping churches have apparently decided that, since Christmas falls on a Sunday (the usual day of worship for many of said churches, I'm presuming), attendance would be too low to justify keeping the churches open. My original assumption was that this was due to some kind of programming bug in the churches, akin to scoring too high on Centipede and having the score roll back over to 0, or getting to the [256th level of Pac-Man](#); there becomes a point where the obligation to go to church becomes so great, it rolls over back to 0 and you don't have to go at all.

But actually, according to the article, the truth is even a bit more interesting: ". . . pastors are canceling services, anticipating low attendance on what they call a family day."

What I find most interesting is that we have a holiday pulling double-duty as both a religious (communal) and family (individual) holiday, giving it an identity crisis even among some who I'd've thought would be most adamant about affirming one duty for the day. Christmas' double duty isn't new; satirical newspaper *The Onion* has offered Easter cards in years past depicting the Easter bunny on a cross, Jesus hopping with a basket, and so on. The Christian Easter holiday, of course, inherited the symbolism of eggs, bunnies, and the like from older pagan rituals. (As such, I blame pagans for [Marshmallow Peeps](#).)

In fact, looking down the lists of major holidays, most of them (at least here in the States) serve more than one role. For example, Halloween is the holiday of kids dressing up and going door to door to beg for candy. However, in recent years it's also grown into a huge holiday for adults . . . one which doesn't involve going door to door, and generally involves a fair bit more partying and alcohol than most of the kiddie celebrations. In fact, in the United States, Halloween is second only to Christmas in terms of dollars spent. (Among some Christian groups it's also All Saints' Eve, the day before the feast of All Saints.)

Looking over our own itinerary for the Christmas break, I note that there are three distinct celebrations that the holiday is being divided into:

- **Familial:** We're gathering with a few different families over the course of three days.
- **Religious:** We're going to church on Christmas Day.
- **Consumerist:** We're going shopping the day after, taking our lives into our hands.

The evolution of a holiday isn't limited just to times long past (such as the case of Easter). For example, [Hanukkah](#) was a relatively minor holiday (in terms of spectacle, if not significance) in the Jewish calendar that assumed greater importance in the 20th century, when Jewish households in America were looking for something to parallel the Christmas experience (both secular and religious) of their friends and neighbors. And Christmas itself was more of a drunken revelry up until concerted efforts were made to transform it into more of a stay-at-home family holiday.

From a roleplaying game standpoint, this realization can be useful in either fabricating new holidays or recasting new ones. After all, it's pretty logical to assume that most alien or alternate cultures would have holidays of some sort to break up the monotony of day-to-day life.

One of the biggest problems with most descriptions of holidays is that it's easy to describe what a holiday is; it's much harder to gauge how *significant* a holiday it is, and for what reasons. For example, in the United States the Fourth of July and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday are both federal holidays, but the former is much more important (and celebrated) to more people than the latter. Likewise in the Catholic tradition the Feast of the Ascension and Christmas are among the few non-Sunday holy days of obligatory church attendance, but Christmas is much more "important" to most Catholics than the Feast. (And Ash Wednesday, a holiday that is more significant to many Catholics than the Feast of the Ascension, is *not* a day of obligation.)

As an intellectual exercise, then, I've tried to create a scale that can be used by those trying to come up with their own holidays. Using a 10-point scale, you can give fabricated holidays a rank of 0 to 10 in five categories (0 meaning that aspect isn't important at all in the holiday, 10 meaning that it is one of the most important holidays in that aspect):

- **Family:** The significance of the holiday to family, family gatherings, and fostering the notion of the nuclear and/or extended family
- **Religion:** The importance of the holiday from a religious standpoint
- **Consumerism:** The importance of the holiday to (gift-giving, cards, going out to eat, and so on . . . basically, all non-essential usage of money or trade)
- **Government:** The significance of the holiday to the government
- **Community:** The importance of the holiday to the community (spending time with friends and members of the community who *aren't* family)

Of course, these ratings would probably vary from region to region, and even to different aspects within a community . . . although high ratings on Consumerism, Governmental, and possibly Community might indicate wider acceptance.

So, as an example, here's a write-up of the American notion of New Year's Eve/Day.

Family: 3 (Some people spend New Year's close to home, but the popular notion of the holiday doesn't factor family greatly.)

Religion: 2 (Some religions might acknowledge the new year, but it isn't celebrated in any real sense.)

Consumerism: 6 (Some people spend a lot of money on parties or going out, but it's not omnipresent. In addition, some stores use the opportunity for New Year's sales; it's a busier-than-normal shopping time, but it isn't all-consuming.)

Government: 7 (The government is closed for New Year's, and many governmental bookkeeping functions -- such as taxes -- use the New Year to reset, but otherwise the holiday doesn't have any great significance)

Community: 8 (New Year's is one of the biggest party days of the year.)

Now, let's look at St. Patrick's Day, here in the U.S.:

Family: 2 (Outside of presenting an opportunity to celebrate a family's Irish heritage, it's not a significant family holiday)

Religion: 4 (St. Patrick's Day is significant to the Catholic and some Anglican holidays, but otherwise not widely celebrated)

Consumerism: 3 (People may drink or celebrate, but otherwise this isn't a huge spending holiday)

Government: 3 (Some local governments, especially those with large Irish populations, are involved in St. Patty's Day celebrations, but most government functions go on as normal)

Community: 6 (Those in the community will probably celebrate it in some way, and regions with a large Irish community are bound to get caught up in celebrations. In addition, St. Patty's Day takes hold in the larger imagination, with many people trying to remember to wear green. However, it's otherwise a fairly trivial holiday.)

Have we got the hang of it? Good. Let's look at three fabricated holidays in a Near-Future Fascist Cyberpunk World:

Black-Out Day

Family: 3

Religion: 4

Consumerism: 3

Government: 0

Community: 9

"Celebrated" on January 10th, Black-Out Day has become a confounding problem for the government; for the past 19 years, hackers have used this day to tear down or disable all government surveillance, starting at 12:01AM on the morning of the 10th. Although no promises are made by the hacking community, the government's grid has generally

remained off-line for at least four hours; one year, the government's surveillance was disabled for almost three days. Although an annoyance for many, Black-Out Day has nevertheless become a de facto holiday, complete with parties and limited drunken revelry. In addition, those who would strike against the government use this day to plot their activities for the coming year, knowing that it will probably be their safest time to do so. Finally, in the past few years many religions have started incorporating Black-Out Day into their services, either to speak out against those who would strike the government or to subtly encourage those who fight against oppression.

V-Time Day

Family: 0

Religion: 0

Consumerism: 6

Government: 2

Community: 5

Created 31 years ago by the Synthplug SkinSuit corporation, this holiday takes place on February 15th, the day after Valentine's Day. On this day, people are encouraged to enter the VirtuaNet, looking for love (or, more often, one-time interfaces); the focus is on meeting someone new and interesting for one day, and to let nature take its course . . . virtually. This holiday is traditionally intended only for single people, as a counterpoint to Valentine Day's focus on couples. However, many people in supposedly dedicated relationships still "celebrate" this day (called Vee-Vee Timers); this holiday has also given rise to a new tradition of dumping or getting dumped on Valentine's day, leaving V-Time Day as a consolation prize for these Re-Vee-Booters. The government doesn't officially acknowledge this event, but it's traditional to plan for February 16th to be a less-than-productive day in most offices. This holiday is also the most popular time to introduce and purchase new interface gear, making it one of the most popular tech-shopping days of the year.

Petition Day

Family: 4

Religion: 6

Consumerism: 5

Government: 9

Community: 4

Established on May 22nd by the government three years after the Great Restructuring, Petition Day is the one day of the year where the government sweeps away much of the bureaucracy that exists in the rest of the year. On this day, the government will strive to resolve all issues within 20 minutes of meeting with a government agent (as opposed to the days or months it can take at other times). Of course, the long lines to see a government agent on this day takes six to eight hours to transverse, but the queued individual still almost always comes out ahead (in time spent, if not result). Enterprising merchants have begun targeting these long lines, cycling parallel to them and offering sales and specials. (The lack of oversight and guarantees is the origin of the phrase "buggy as a P-Day chip," although many people still look forward to these savings events.) Many religions have begun trying to encourage those members who don't have P-Day matters themselves to wait in line for the church's affairs; as such, these churches have begun treating Petition Day obligations as holy and fruitful work. Other interest groups have begun following suit.

Holidays are an important part of almost every culture, and with a bit of thought you can convey to players (and yourself) the import and interest of a holiday. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to get ready to drive for 10 hours to partake in my own revelry . . . since, according to my notes, this holiday ranks pretty high on most scales.

Happy holidays to all!

--Steven Marsh

Tanir Aesayya

by Matt Riggsby

Though some elves live in towns and cities immediately recognizable as such, with marble spires and thick stone walls, the majority of the elven population lives in settlements deep in the forests of the world. Many are small settlements, little more than extended households, but a few rise to the size of towns and cities. Tanir Aesayya is one of the largest.

Geography and Land Use

Tanir Aesayya lies a few miles inside a large ancient forest in a relatively warm part of a temperate zone (with summer highs in the 90s and winter lows in the 30s). The closest land beyond the forest is poor for farming but good grazing land, so it is occupied mostly by shepherds with a few small villages scattered here and there. From the edge of the forest, it is perhaps a day's travel from Tanir Aesayya to the nearest small stronghold or town of more than 2,000 people, and four or five days to the nearest human city. The land on which the forest grows is fairly smooth, with only small hills and a gentle slope falling down towards the edge.

Past a relatively thin border zone, the forest itself is remarkably dense and multi-layered. At ground level, there is thick but patchy shade-loving undergrowth: ferns, scrubby bushes, ivy-like vine plants, and the like. Rising above them, particularly closer to the edges of the forest, are smaller trees (50 feet or less), mostly gnarled oaks and a few other hardwoods but with a large minority of firs and a small number of others. Towering over those is a taller layer of unusually tall, thick oaks, with a minority of various evergreens and a few unusual trees seen only in elven forests. Aside from the elves, the forest is inhabited by small animals: birds, rabbits, squirrels, and the like. There is a handful of bears and small deer, but the density of the vegetation means that one is unlikely to encounter anything bigger than a moderately sized fox or boar. There are also a few more unusual animals, including a number of unicorns and the like.

Because of the great density of growth, a number of paths through the forests are kept clear by the elves. Many of them, though, are at least partially hidden or require the people following them to climb up into the trees for part of the way, so those who don't already know their way around and don't have a good eye for detail may stumble onto paths that appear to lead nowhere. Other breaks in the growth include a number of streams cutting through the forest, although many are hidden by particularly tall trees spreading their branches overhead and a few intentionally cultivated clearings.

The town itself has a population of about 10,000. The most densely populated core section covers about a half of a square mile, although a ring of sentry posts -- inside which just about all the elves spend most of their time -- defines an area about three times as large, with several streams running through it.

History

There have been elves in the forest for as long as anyone cares to remember (which, among a population of immortals, is saying something), although not always large settlements. Originally, it appears that the elves lived in extended households in groups of up to 50 or 60, although most were much smaller. Occasional market days, held at a particularly large clearing, brought larger numbers of elves together temporarily, sometimes with the addition of humans and others who had come from the outside to trade.

About a thousand years ago, the edges of the forest came under pressure from increasing numbers of orcs: hunting, cutting trees for construction or the sheer joy of destruction, and so on. The orcish incursion was causing human kingdoms to collapse around the forest, but the elves, largely disconnected from and unconnected with the outside world, managed to hold their own line. In order to do so, they had to spend more time near the edges of the forest and increase coordination among what had previously been completely independent households. This coordination took the

form of adopting the old marketplace as a meeting place and central headquarters and appointing war leaders to coordinate the defense of the forest. The institution of the dukedom originated at this time, as did the use of the clearing at Tanir Aesayya as a settlement ("Tanir" is a word in the local dialect for "marketplace").

For the next several centuries, the forest was cut off from direct contact with the outside world, since the region around it was occupied by orcish hordes. Apart from a small handful of notably brave individuals venturing in or out, communication with the outside was largely magical, and the few attempts to find allies against the slowly advancing enemy failed. The forest itself slowly shrank under constant if somewhat desultory assaults, although a spirited elven defense combined with a lack of coordination by the orcs prevented the shrinkage from becoming severe.

About 600 years ago, the situation began to change as a growing human presence began to push back against the orcs. Ambitious new kingdoms, with superior weapons and coordination, rolled back the orcish occupation. Ciaranon, the duke at the time, struck an informal alliance with some of the humans, lending out archers to support the humans, whose forces were lacking in that department. A number of elves resented Ciaranon's drawing what little strength they had away from their borders, and during this period they did suffer some grievous losses both in terms of elven lives and ancient trees, but ultimately Ciaranon's judgment seems to have proven sound. About 300 years ago, after a climactic battle, a last united horde of orcs was smashed by a combined human-elven army, effectively ending the orcish presence (although mopping up took a few extra decades). Ciaranon, who personally led the elves into battle, was killed, and was succeeded by his nephew Tylaleas.

With the outside world once again opened up, Tylaleas set about instituting more outward-looking policies. He retained his uncle's alliances, justifying increased dealings with the (to elven minds) unpredictable and transient human dynasties by the belief that a united front would be necessary to prevent future orcish incursions. Tylaleas has also actively looked for elves displaced from their homes by similar misfortunes and invited them to Tanir Aesayya to help repopulate the forest and cultivate replacements for ancient trees destroyed during the centuries of orcish wars. These "refugees" now constitute about 15% of the town's population.

In the years since the end of the wars, Tanir Aesayya has largely retained the form it had at that time. Since habits die hard among the immortal elves, the move to "stand down" from a war footing has been slow. Patrols around the borders of the forest are still maintained, even though orcs haven't been seen for nearly two centuries; they mostly prevent poaching and illicit wood cutting. Because of the casualties suffered during the wars, a majority of the current population has only known life in the town, not in the widely separated "tree-holds" which preceded it, so there was little pressure to move back, although older elves do tend to spend longer periods of time walking through the woods. The elves have made accommodations for increased visitors from the outside, but difficulties in communication persist, and outsiders can often feel slightly uncomfortable even though they find nothing but smiles and courtesy.

Society

Imagine a small town. Everyone knows everybody else, their families, their business, their stories about the great flood of aught-six. Now extend that knowledge to a small city. That, more or less, defines society in Tanir Aesayya. Sooner or later, everyone ends up dealing with everyone else, and after a century or three, that adds up.

Humans often see elven culture as complex, sometimes incomprehensibly so. But though elves do seem to have fondness for ceremony and elaborate social displays, part of it is simply that elven communities tend to build up a great deal of social shorthand: private jokes that are repeated so often that they can be communicated almost by vague allusion, social conventions invented to take into account this or that individual's personal preferences, shifting hierarchies of social precedence which only make sense if one knows all the players intimately. Dealing with the elves of Tanir Aesayya might be compared to dealing with members of a devoutly religious society who have a relevant passage from the Bible or the Qur'an on their lips for every occasion. You may speak the language, but you may not have to context to understand the nuances of what anybody says.

Another ramification of immortality is that the conflicts and prejudices of the past are still there in the present. Refugees are still refugees despite having lived in Tanir Aesayya for multiple human lifetimes, some elves hold Tylaleas as responsible for the deaths of family members as his predecessor, and a few elders still privately grumble

that the office of duke was supposed to be temporary, lasting for centuries rather than millennia, and should be dissolved now that the war is over and the orcs are gone.

So, then, society at Tanir Aesayya is more or less egalitarian, with no legally recognized classes, but there are nevertheless social divisions and political factions. The main division is between natives and refugees. Neither can really be said to have higher status than the other, but they tend not to socialize with one another as much as they do within their own groups. Although they've had enough time to learn one another's ways and customs, there's still social friction expressed in varying degrees of accommodation. Subtleties of dress and language are used to express solidarity with one group or another. For example, just about anything can be said using a relatively neutral expression or one from either native or refugee dialect. While the statements have approximately the same meaning, the one chosen indicates a preference for one side or another. Outsiders, of course, have a very hard time picking up on the subtleties.

There is a lesser generational division as well, between pre-war elders, elves born during the wars, and those born after the war. The first group is relatively conservative and increasingly solitary, the second is slow to make friends but prizes personal loyalty, and the third is split between isolationist conservatives and more worldly wanderers. However, all of these differences are largely just faint tendencies. Because of the low elven birth rate, children tend to be assimilated into the culture as a whole rather than identifying with very rare age-peers.

Trade, Industry, and Economics

Though they have great love of all manner of plants, the elves around Tanir Aesayya are mainly interested in the cultivation of trees, although cultivation may be too strong a word for it. They watch the development of trees, encouraging their growth in various ways, but do no planting or harvesting. Rather, they adapt themselves to the trees as much as they adapt the trees to their own needs.

Over slow centuries of management and subtle magical alteration, the elves have perfected their environment. The tall trees bear sweet acorns (sweet, in the sense that they aren't laden with the tannins which render ordinary acorns toxic), nuts, fruit, and edible flowers, a favorite item in the elven diet, all rounded out with herbs and edible mushrooms. All grow in superabundant quantities. That, and the fact that the tall trees allow the elves to take advantage of a third dimension in their subsistence strategy, gives the elves the ability to support many more individuals on far less land than the societies around them. These foods are occasionally supplemented with birds and game shot in the forest. Meat is not eaten frequently, and when it is, it's usually used in small quantities, smoked or otherwise preserved, to provide flavor more than substance.

Most of the goods the elves export are fine woodwork: furniture, ornaments, musical instruments, and high-quality bows. They also produce high-quality textiles, some from vegetable fibers harvested inside the forest, others from imported wool. Tanir Aesayya produces small quantities of a unique, extremely fine and durable fiber believed to be derived from spider silk and enhanced by mystical means. Important imports include metal tools and glass objects. The elves have returned to the custom of weekly market days, but those now mark peaks in commercial activity; traveling merchants and craftsmen are allowed to visit at any time. Most exchanges are barter rather than cash, although the elves will accept money if they can't trade for goods. They are exceptionally patient bargainers with a good eye for quality, but they do ultimately offer fair exchange.

The internal economy of Tanir Aesayya is rather different. The elves know the value of a gold piece. Among themselves, however, they don't see the point of using them. Goods are rarely transferred in reciprocal exchanges. Rather, they're given to whoever appears to need or desire them. Chalk up another one to immortality, perhaps, but after centuries of contact between individuals and families, the elves are disinclined to keep close track of every jot and tittle. Goods change hands like resources in an extended family, moving around fairly freely as needed with the expectation of eventual reciprocation. However, dealings between natives and refugees are often characterized by actual bargaining.

Government and Politics

The town is officially ruled by a noble whose title probably translates best as "duke." There have been seven dukes so far, six of whom have died in battle. Tylaleas has been in office for longer than any of them, and at this rate may be duke longer than all of his predecessors together. The duke's primary duty is as defender of the forest realm. He commands the guards and may call up additional forces when necessary. In that capacity, he also has executive authority over external affairs, negotiating alliances with outsiders, serving as the sole court for affairs concerning outsiders.

The duke also acts as a judge for internal disputes, but here his power is that of an administrator or moderator rather than a ruler. When parties to a dispute cannot settle it themselves, it becomes a matter for public debate. Regular "courts" are held in which the parties involved present their cases and the neutral parties present attempt to come up with a solution. The duke, who must hear all such cases, imposes discipline and formality on the process through elaborate ceremonies (calling the disputants to be heard, asking certain ritual questions, imposing traditional oaths, and so on). He has the power to impose a solution of his own if the disputants can't agree on one themselves after a period of time, traditionally from one full moon to another, although that power is rarely used.

This process seems to serve the elves well, and internally they seem quite content, except for the lasting division between natives and refugees. The problem here seems to be one of natives being reluctant to accept the refugees as equal residents of the forest and refugees reacting negatively to that. Many disputes which must be settled publicly are between natives and refugees. Since the duke granted new homes to the refugees, they tend to be his supporters politically, so the duke has been at pains not to display any favoritism towards them in his pronouncements.

There are also external issues which fall outside of the process which cause considerable dispute. Formally, no outsider is allowed to enter the forest without the duke's permission, although these days there is a blanket grant of permission for merchants traveling to the market. Anyone not entering the forest through approved routes and submitting to inspection by guards is presumed to be a spy, thief, or poacher and will be apprehended and brought before the duke. A controversial exception to these general rules allows a certain amount of timber harvesting at the edge of the forest by the humans living nearby. This has caused endless quibbling both with humans and between elven factions about its allowable extent. The humans seem somewhat blind to the markers the elves have set up indicating which trees may be taken, and many elves, particularly those who survived the war, don't want *anyone* cutting down trees. At the moment, the discontent is just grumbling, but it is quite widespread.

Military and Law Enforcement

The town keeps a standing force of 100 guards who patrol the forest and man the sentry posts. On reaching adulthood, every resident of the town is required to take one-year turns as a guard on a rotating basis. At present rates, that's about once every century. This is less a standing army than a first line of defense. In the event of war, everyone is expected to do their duty (although it may be the duty of some not to fight) whether it's their turn or not.

When the elves do go on the march, they're a formidable force. For one thing, the long, slow growth of the trees doesn't need constant tending; thus, as long as they're defending their own territory, the elves can put the majority of the city's adult population into the field, which is in turn the majority of the city's total population. Where a human civilization can rarely keep more than one or two percent of its people in the field for any length of time, elves can, if need be, hit the high nineties.

Second, though few have the temperament of professional warriors, most elves have several human lifetimes of experience with bows, stealth, and living off the forest, and most can bring some sort of useful magic to bear. It takes a brave outsider to face an elven guerilla war, and a foolish one to face it for very long.

Architecture

Unlike some other elves, the wood elves of Tanir Aesayya don't go in for building in a big way. Their homes are constructed flexibly in and around trees. The elves describe their building technique as a negotiation between tree and inhabitants. The trees grow without cutting, but the elves coax the tree's limbs to grow in ways making them easy to

build in. Except for a few small grass-covered plazas, there is little visible sign of habitation at ground level. Inhabited trees mostly have ladders and spiral staircases, with steps fixed around the trunk of the tree, leading up into the branches.

Living and working spaces start only where substantial branches begin, and at any rate at least twice the height of a person above ground level. At that level, the platforms start. Livable spaces are built on platforms made from plank and beams individually cut to fit on and around the limbs of the trees. Elven carpenters make heavy use of dovetail joints which lock structural members around supporting limbs, never resorting to metal nails. The platforms work their way up and around, with many small patches of floor arranged in a step-like fashion spiraling up the tree, and they are frequently reworked as the tree grows. Walls, such as they are, are likewise placed to take best advantage of the tree's limbs, although given the relatively warm climate during most of the year, the tree's canopy of leaves is sufficient to provide privacy. It's often difficult, therefore, to say whether one is inside or outside in a tree occupied by elves. Only during the coldest days of winter do enough walls and tapestries go up that rooms, in the conventional sense, can be distinguished. Many of the inhabited trees are hollow, and those spaces are frequently used for storage of particularly vulnerable goods such as books and alchemical ingredients.

Though most of the construction the elves do is inside each tree's canopy of leaves, and therefore invisible to most observers, they do provide external decoration. The fashion in Tanir Aesayya is to make brightly colored banners and ribbons and fasten them to a tree's outer branches. When the wind blows, densely inhabited trees become a riot of motion and color as the banners unfurl themselves.

The only piece of "permanent" architecture in Tanir Aesayya is, some elves would say, the only part of the settlement which really should be called Tanir Aesayya. At the center of the settlement is a large clearing surrounded by some of the tallest trees in the forest, the ancient marketplace which was pressed into service as a military headquarters. Once again, it serves its original purpose, hosting foreign merchants who have come to buy and sell. The permanent installation here is a large paved mosaic covering about a hundred square yards, decorated with a variety of scenes from elven history and legend. At one edge is set a tall marble throne, occupied by the duke when he holds court. Academically inclined visitors may come from hundreds of miles away to see the exquisite but unidentified workmanship.

Tanir Aesayya in the Campaign

Tanir Aesayya is a pretty nice place. The GM may want to emphasize the quiet (but not dead silence; there will always be bird sounds, leaves rustling, and the like), the usually warm weather, the lush greenery surrounding the small patches of well-kept meadow, and so on. There's plenty to eat, and the natives are generally polite. The forest is not a bad place to rest and recuperate if the PCs can behave themselves.

However, many PCs should feel a little uncomfortable. There are few if any physical threats present in the town, but PCs are likely to feel that they don't belong there. The lifestyle will be unusual and either boring or frustrating for faster-paced mortals, and all the residents clearly know a great deal that outsiders don't. Visitors will often feel that they're being condescended to, although they might not be able to say exactly why.

Tanir Aesayya, therefore, is more likely to be a stop along the way than a permanent base of operations. It makes a very good destination for trade, particularly to find items which are unusual but are not, say, powerful magical artifacts. The market is a good place to pick up high-quality mundane goods, all of which are likely to have a unique charm, and the occasional enchanted object. Knowledge would be another commodity PCs could acquire there. Centuries-old elves may remember lost secrets, know the answers to historical riddles, and have personally met ancient heroes.

The town would also be an interesting "x-factor" in a diplomatic setting. Outside PCs might have to appeal to the elves for extraordinary aid to gain the upper hand in an otherwise purely human dispute, attempting to sway the elves to favor an alliance with them instead of a different kingdom. For their part, the elves are likely to have a very different set of priorities in the usual give-and-take of gold and power over territory, making them difficult to negotiate with.

Here are some other adventure possibilities:

Forest Rangers: In this scenario, the elves might oppose PCs, or at least be an obstacle, without necessarily being enemies. The PCs need to gather rare herbs and mushrooms, unicorn horns, or other semi-mystical materials for reasons of their own. The forest around Tanir Aesayya is probably the most accessible source for such materials, but there's a problem: the elves don't want anybody taking them. Natural-born conservationists, they take a dim view of anyone baiting meadows with virgins or clear-cutting roads into the forest in order to find the rare purple mandrake root. PCs have the choice of either trying to talk the elves out of a few remarkably rare plants and animals, which is hard, or trying to sneak around them, which is harder.

Monsters, Monsters: After centuries of guarding their borders, the elves are safe from attack from the outside, which makes an apparent attack from the inside that much more terrifying. The deep, dark center of the forest has been ignored for centuries, and something has appeared there which doesn't like elves any more than the orcs do. A number of elves who have tried to cross the forest lately have not returned, and some have been found bloodily killed. Perhaps a nest of demons has established itself in the depths of the forest, or perhaps a group of trolls, to many minds little more than the cousins of orcs, have come out of tunnels deep under the forest to establish themselves above ground. What is at the root of the problem? And more importantly, what can the PCs do to help?

Return of the Orcs: It's been a few quiet centuries, but no more. News has arrived that a vast new orcish horde is advancing from what was once a safe distance. Can foresighted elves rally the complacent humans around them in time to undo the long work of rebuilding? PCs could act as scouts and "special ops" fighters sent to evaluate and delay orcish progress, ambassadors and messengers for the elves sent to try to convince the humans to forget their own squabbles, or humans whom the elves are trying to convince of the need for unity with their untrustworthy neighbors.

Forest Rebellion: The silent majority has finally had enough. They're staging a coup d'etat against Duke Tylaleas. Will they replace him with their own candidate for the office? A ruling council rather than a single ruler? Or dispense with the office altogether? The insurrectionists will probably have factions favoring each solution. Tylaleas, of course, won't take this lying down (unless they kill him, but his supporters will still be around). The coup will bring all the factions hidden underneath layers of ceremony and etiquette to the surface, and it won't be pretty. PCs could be rebels against the duke, loyalists (probably refugees, possibly able to call on aid from outside), or outsiders, probably caught up in a new wave of isolationism and anti-mortal sentiment.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!

Pyramid Review

Dos Rios

Published by [Mayfair Games](#)

Designed by Franz Benno Delonge

Graphics by Franz Vohwinkel

Translated by William Niebling

18 board pieces, 40 river tiles, 15 harvest cards, 44 player counters in four colors, 40 dams, 50 money bills, & rules sheet; full-color, boxed, for two to four players; \$49

Seems like every other game on the market sees players securing land, hunting on that land, or pulling crops from that land. Mayfair's ***Dos Rios*** ("two rivers," if you haven't gotten at least the *Sesame Street* crash course in Spanish) goes the farming route, putting you in the role of hidalgo as you try to keep the water flowing to your precious crops.

The object of the game is to be the first to complete your buildings.

The setup phase entails laying out the initial path of the two rivers, called the Rio Verde (Green River) and Rio Moreno (Brown River, though watch with amusement as people try not to become confused and call it by actress Rita Moreno's name). The top of the board shows the mountains and the bottom, the city and its surrounding river-fed lakes. The river, represented by several short blue pieces, has to follow certain rules as it meanders down the board, going from higher elevations to lower-lying land. Hills and forests also dot the landscape, separated into hexagonal spaces. The rest of the playing field has crops of corn, grain, and tobacco.

The pawns are called campesinos, and they're the only unit players have to start with. These fellows trek across the board to occupy river spaces. Once moved, your "meeples" can build structures for you. You can place buildings on the same spot as one of your workers, or construct a dam. Dams will channel the water in new directions, allowing you to irrigate different crops or draw the flow away from your opponents' farms. A series of harvest cards show which crops are due to bear fruit. Once you've finished moving and building units, you must choose whether to start or delay the harvest (the latter usually because others are in a better position to make use of it than you).

Anyone occupying fields through which the rivers currently run may benefit from the harvest. Some cards specify a crop, i.e., the corn card pays off for anyone in an irrigated cornfield; others may stipulate an entire river (anyone along the entire length of the Rio Verde scores for their crops). A paying field scores 100 rio, money that funds your buildings, while occupied forests provide new dam counters. Buildings don't move, obviously, but they pull in a harvest just like campesinos. Players must be wary not only of shifting waterways but of the desperados who sweep down from the mountains and send meeples back into the unproductive city; and of campesinos maneuvering to push your counters off their spaces before they pay off. You win the game if you're the first to put up all five of your buildings anywhere on the board. If you build four structures along the rivers, you win an early victory.

There's a lot going on across the map, so things get crowded in no time with four people vying for property. Fortunately the map and components are broad enough that you're not fumbling with thick fingers to push things about. Everything's bright and colorful, as God intended European games to be, and the wooden pieces are pleasingly substantial. The only real physical drawback is, like Mayfield's [La Strada](#) entry, the center of the board is composed of several smaller pieces that can be switched and rotated to create a new board every game -- and the pieces won't all fit.

You end up with a piece here or there hanging over its neighbors by maybe an eighth of an inch.

For all the building you must do and strategy you must employ, this product is refreshingly free of slow, numbing procedures. Movement across the board is fast; getting a new strategy into place can be done in a turn or two; and making the money you need can happen quickly, even on someone else's turn. There's plenty you can do in a round, but once you've settled on a plan you can employ it in short order. The flip side of this is the fluid nature of the game. Four people are jostling each other for success, which means the river snaking around the board isn't just an expression . . . all your hard work can be undone in a single round. But since it's easy to line your ducks up in a fairly tight row, it may just be a question of waiting for your turn to come back around again.

At the speed the game moves, it's not an all-night affair (unless you want it to be, and you may), but it is a lot to take in. The rules aren't without moments where you have to put your own two and two together, but it's all rather straightforward in the end. With plenty of last-minute reversals of fortune, ***Dos Rios*** may not be the sturdiest example of strategy gaming, but players don't have to sweat that a few mistakes at the start of the game spell doom. It offers an equal footing to all comers, and the built-in handicaps level the playing field. Now if only the die-cutting machine that stamps it would do the same.

--*Andy Vetromile*

The Sorcerer's Impediments

Converted to an *In Nomine* "Hevvy" Adventure for Angels

by Elizabeth McCoy

Prologue

[*The Sorcerer's Impediments*](#) was designed as an introduction to [*In Nomine*](#) and edited down to a stand-alone file containing all the rules (many simplified or glossed) needed to actually play. For those who would like to use that adventure in their regular *In Nomine* "Hevvy" campaign (instead of the "Lite" one the adventure was originally designed for), here is everything that was stripped out of the e23 adventure. You *will* need to download [*The Sorcerer's Impediments*](#) for the rest!

While pre-generated player-characters for *GURPS* and *In Nomine* are included, the concept is simple enough to be dropped in the laps of just about any group of angels -- or hostile demons!

For that matter, nothing's stopping the Game Master from inflicting the situation on mundane investigators . . .

* * *

There are angels and there are demons; there are Archangels and there are Demon Princes. Long ago, God and Lucifer had a discussion about Free Will; now, there's a secret War between Heaven and Hell. Angels work toward the betterment of the universal Symphony; demons want to impose their personal symphonies on everyone else. Angels prefer selflessness, thinking of the group above the individual. Demons, naturally, want to be the one on top and to Hell -- or somewhere -- with everyone else on the bottom.

And then there are the humans -- some serve knowingly, Soldiers of God or Hell. Some are servants and minions. And some . . . are sorcerers, who conjure up spirits and demons. Most of those are damned by Hell-tainted rituals, seduced by the promises of the Demon of Sorcery, who serves the Prince of Fate.

Naturally, that tends to upset the angels, and they try to . . . contain the problem.

GM's Notes

As a fast adventure, a certain amount of handwaving may be required. Places where the GM should decide details, based on the group's playstyle, will have GM's Notes with suggestions.

Act One: Target Acquisition

This section is short and straightforward, so that the GM and players may get a sense for what their resources and objectives are.

It is sad but true that the practice of sorcery tends to require Essence expenditures, and then there's the demon-summoning aspects -- both of which the Symphony tends to protest in the form of disturbance which the Aware (celestials, Soldiers, sorcerers) can perceive.

Thus disturbance has come to the attention of the player characters, the local agents of Heaven. As they are the only characters in the near vicinity, it falls to them to find out where the disturbance came from, and do something appropriate about it. E.g., if the disturbance is caused by a friendly angel or Soldier, chide him for being noisy and

trade phone numbers for later use. If the disturbance is caused by one of the forces of Hell, smite -- or, as there is a Seraph of Destiny in the group -- assess for redemption potential.

Therefore, when discovering agents of Hell or ethereals, the pre-generated PCs have the options of "turn them to the bright side," kill them, frighten them away, or capture them, as appropriate.

GM Notes: Aiming the PCs

There are three ways characters could get involved in a plot such as this. The fastest way is to assume that the group already knows what to do when they detect disturbance, they know each other, and they all meet in the closest coffee house or fast-food place because they were in the right place at the right time to hear and investigate.

Another common tactic is that a passing celestial, Soldier, or Saint detected disturbance, and called up whichever Seneschal has jurisdiction over the area. This would mean that one of the PCs (probably the Seraph) would talk to someone higher-ranking, and get to pass the rest along to his associates in the area.

The third way is direct Superior intervention. The matter has come to an Archangel's attention -- don't bother asking how, because if it were important, he'd have mentioned -- and he's contacted the PC(s) directly.

Some players enjoy meeting their PCs' Bosses. Others get twitchy about being pushed around by authority figures, and would rather ferret out plots by themselves. Some GMs prefer a less "special Servitor" model of player characters, and emphasize the hierarchy with supervisors and Seneschals. Pick which model the GM and players are most comfortable with.

Act Two: Target Disposal

In which the player characters and the non-player characters encounter each other and determine their conflicts of interest.

The location is an older house, on the outskirts of town, with no near neighbors. While the player characters and their target are *probably* the only Symphonically aware people in range, they can't be sure of that. Best to try to minimize disturbance for as long as possible. Good thing they have a Soldier to help.

Here are the additional complications that were omitted from the Lite version.

GM Notes: Longer Adventures

Just because this is designed as an introductory adventure, to be played quickly and give everyone a taste of the system and setting, doesn't mean that it couldn't be an incident in an ongoing campaign -- or that the players might not decide to make meticulous plans and preparations. If this is what the group finds *fun*, and there's enough time to get through it . . . let them!

Aside from spying (with the Kyriotate and bird-hosts or mundane cameras), PCs might research the property the disturbance came from. If this is the case, the players might want to take more time on it than a fast game might need - or the GM might want to give this information to the players immediately, as part of the prior off-screen investigation.

If the GM wants to skip all the research, instead provide information that a toddler has been kidnapped at a time corresponding to Song-disturbance in the area -- and let the angels rush to the rescue.

Alexandre's Office

Here is a more detailed version of what the PCs might find in the office on p. 6 of *The Sorcerer's Impediments*. Use

this data if the players enjoy solving puzzles, or if they've managed to break in when both sorcerer and demon are out of the house and the GM needs to stall to increase tension.

Aside from the methods listed in the Lite adventure, the desk's lock may also yield to a straight Lockpicking roll, which causes no disturbance.

Inside the desk are Alexandre's sorcerous notes. He keeps two sets -- one in plain text, and one in code: fractured Latin and Greek, riddles, backward handwriting, and the like. The stolen ritual (see Ummah's background, p. 8 of *The Sorcerer's Impediments*) is also here. A sufficiently extraordinary roll on a suitable skill (Knowledge (Occultism), Sorcery, etc.) or a default may find a key to undoing the bonds that link the demonlings with their vessels, which can be exploited by the PCs! If the angels can't figure out that trick, though, they can always try to . . . persuade . . . Alexandre or Ummah to assist them.

The computer contains the start of a (rather dreadful) manuscript which appears to be in some kind of esoteric code, with information in riddles, parables, and metaphors. (It is based from the coded notebook, if the PCs have seen that.) The computer's files also contain pornography, written and photographed. Some of it is in the same style as the manuscript. Some of the pictures are of a stunningly sexy woman -- and use of resonance through media (*In Nomine*, p. 57) on *those* could give interesting information indeed, as they are of Ummah herself.

Where's Who?

As noted above, the PCs might spy on the occupants and plot to break in at some point when the human (and "human") occupants are absent. In a short session, use the material in "Where's Who" section the e23 document. For random choice or longer plotting . . .

Alexandre Darkmoon spends most of his time in one of three places, depending on time of day and the GM's sadistic whims. For random choice, roll a d6: 1-2, basement; 3-4, office; 5-6: bedroom. He avoids the kitchen save when he notices he's hungry, and usually eats in his office or bedroom.

Ummah is ostensibly a demon familiar, so her location depends on where Alexandre is. If he's working in his office, she is probably in the basement, tormenting the demonlings for her own amusement, or in the bedroom, preparing it for her "master" (flip a coin if undecided, or roll a d6 for evens or odds). If he's in the basement, she's there too, aiding Alexandre in preparing more vessels. If he's in the bedroom, then she's keeping her pet (and herself) satiated there until he has to sleep -- then it's back to the basement for demon torment, or library for reading up on taxidermy or trashy fiction.

The **Demonling Horde** is kept in the basement in the day. At night, with strict instructions not to stray for long, they are set loose to find more vessel parts. This could pose a problem for small, furry Kyriotate hosts who are spying on the area.

If the GM has spurred the PCs into action with a kidnapping, the child is in a cage in the non-demonling side of the basement -- alive, if without food, drink, or a diaper change. (On the plus side, a 3-Force toddler is a potential host with some communication ability . . .)

And What Do We Do With Them?

With access to the "going celestial" rules, Ummah has another tactic besides using her resonance or talking her way out of things . . . celestial combat. Her potent Will makes her highly dangerous in that arena, even without considering her Calabite nature.

Meanwhile, capture of the sorcerer may be easier with a Kyriotate on the team -- though that will bring the dissonance conditions of the Domination into play, for longer term complications.

Characters

A large part of the appeal of an *In Nomine* game is the characters and their interactions. Situations may be violent or peaceful based not just on supernatural abilities, but on approach and personality. The most aggressive angel of War may have a meeting of minds and hearts with a demon of the War, and the most peaceful Servitor of Flowers might say the wrong thing and find himself fleeing sniper fire. The Words, Choirs, and Bands certainly suggest the bell-curve of how interactions are likely to proceed, but they're not straight-jackets.

These are the complete character sheets for the characters listed in [The Sorcerer's Impediments](#), plus an additional player-character angel. Where the descriptive information is entirely duplicated in the Lite adventure, it has been omitted here.

Player Characters

Here are four pre-generated characters for use in this adventure. As Servitors of Yves, Blandine, and Gabriel -- and one of Eli's, in service to Blandine -- they could also be used in many of the adventure seeds from [Superiors 3: Hope and Prophecy](#), which details the Archangels of Destiny, Dreams, and Fire. ([In Nomine Superiors: Eli](#), from [e23](#), expands on the powers, personality, and Servitor culture of the Archangel of Creation.)

The characters are arranged in order of Choir, from most holy to most worldly. While they have default names and genders, players may adjust either.

JONATHAN

Seraph of Destiny

Corporeal Forces - 2	Strength 4	Agility 4
Ethereal Forces - 3	Intelligence 7	Precision 5
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 6	Perception 10

Vessel: Human/4

Skills: Artistry/1 (Painting), Computer Operation/1, Detect Lies/2, Emote/1, Knowledge/5 (Literature), Languages (English/3*, Spanish/1), Singing/1

Songs: Healing (Corporeal/5, Ethereal/2, Celestial/1), Shields (Corporeal/5)

Attunement: Seraph of Destiny

* Jonathan gets one Language/3 for free; *In Nomine*, p. 75.

Jonathan is a young Seraph of Destiny, recently assigned to the corporeal realm, Earth. He has faith in his Archangel's faith in him, and this makes him confident and assured. It also makes him take his job very seriously, and he will push for the obvious rightness of any tactics that advance the Word of Destiny and foil the Word of Fate.

As a young Seraph, he still takes conversation very literally; beware of using euphemisms around him, for he has a tendency to use his resonance to figure out what the Truth is, and blurt it out.

(This is Jonathan from [Fall of the Malakim](#), p. 69. GMs may decide that this is part of his "past," "future," or simply an alternate reality to the events which occurred in that book.)

MERARI

Malakite of Fire

Corporeal Forces - 4 Strength 8 Agility 8
Ethereal Forces - 2 Intelligence 4 Precision 4
Celestial Forces - 3 Will 6 Perception 6

Vessel: Human/4

Skills: Acrobatics/1, Climbing/1, Dodge/2, Escape/1, Fast-Talk/2, Fighting/4, Running/1

Songs: Claws/1, Healing (Corporeal/2), Shields (Corporeal/6, Celestial/4)

Attunement: Malakite of Fire*

** Merari's assigned targets are those who cruelly raise false hopes in others. She may recognize anyone who does this, though only the one currently in her "target" slot will be dissonant to ignore.*

Merari is not so new to Earth as Jonathan, but she is no expert at corporeal life. Fortunately, she tempers her urges toward violence when around Servitors of Destiny, and Seraphim she feels she should obey.

Though a bit slow of thought in celestial society, Merari is not *stupid* -- her intelligence is human-normal. She's perfectly capable of coming up with reasonable plans, and is not so lazy or careless as to insist on jumping in with hands flaming. Of course, if the plan should happen to involve flaming hands and mayhem, she's the Virtue for the job and happy to do her part.

HASADIAH

Kyriotate of Creation, in service to Blandine

Corporeal Forces - 3 Strength 7 Agility 5
Ethereal Forces - 2 Intelligence 3 Precision 5
Celestial Forces - 4 Will 9 Perception 7

Skills: Dodge/6, Emote/3, Escape/2, Fast-Talk/2, Fighting/1, Lockpicking/3, Lying/2, Move Silently/3, Ranged Weapon/2 (Pistol), Savoir-Faire/2

Songs: Entropy (Celestial/3), Healing (Corporeal/6)

Attunement: Kyriotate of Creation

Hasadiah is a Kyriotate, who refers to itself as "they," giving rise to such mangling of language as "we am the Kyriotate in the squirrel, the mouse, and the librarian." Fortunately, most other people call Hasa "it," or whatever gender its host of the moment is. (This can also cause confusion; as a Kyriotate of Creation, Hasa is able to modify the host's form nearly as well as a computer expert modifies a CGI model.)

Like Merari, Hasadiah is human-normal intelligence -- the lower end of it. This makes the Domination an unlikely match for the Archangel of Dreams and the realm of sleeping minds, but teamed with a Soldier, Hasadiah can keep things running smoothly in the corporeal realm, while the Soldier works on the ethereal plane.

KRIS MURPHY

Soldier of Dreams

Corporeal Forces - 2 Strength 3 Agility 5
Ethereal Forces - 2 Intelligence 3 Precision 4
Celestial Forces - 2 Will 5 Perception 3

Status: 2

Skills*: Dodge/3, Dreaming/4, Driving/2, Knowledges (Local Area/3, Psychology/3, War-games/1), Lying/2, Medicine/1, Ranged Weapon/2 (Pistol), Swimming/1, Tactics/4

Song: Dreams (Corporeal/1)

Advantage: Toughness/1

* *Kris has the free skill package for humans, from p. 24 of the **Corporeal Player's Guide**.*

When in the Marches, Kris has a habit of telling hostile dream-spirits, "I'm Murphy, and I'm the worst thing to go wrong for you." On Earth, Kris is a bit less showy. Still, someone's got to keep the angels from being too openly supernatural, remind them to go to the bathroom, take baths, and eat pizza now and then . . .

Since a Soldier's life can be full of emergencies, Kris tends to drift from job to job, but mostly looks like a college student and does take a few classes now and then (especially Psychology, which helps when trying to understand and explain humanity to non-humans). Kris works closely with Hasadiah -- when the Kyriotate is in control, Kris is in the Marches, which is a fine place indeed for a Soldier of Dreams.

Non-Player Characters

If the GM uses a kidnapped toddler to spur the PCs into action, the child has have 3 Forces and negligible characteristics; assign a 2 for any resistance purposes unless the Game Master has plans for a follow-on adventure.

ALEXANDRE DARKMOON

Sorcerer

Corporeal Forces - 1*	Strength 3	Agility 3
Ethereal Forces - 2	Intelligence 4	Precision 4
Celestial Forces - 3	Will 7	Perception 5

Status: 2

Skills*: Computer Operation/1, Command/2, Driving/1, Focus/2, Knowledges (Local Area/3, Sorcery/3, Taxidermy/1), Ranged Weapon/1 (Pistol), Small Weapon/1 (Knife), Swimming/1, Summon/2

Rituals: Suggest (Command), Create Vessel† (Focus), Summon Demonling (Summon)

Advantage: Toughness/2

Disadvantages: Damaged Sense/1 (Sight), Lustful/2, Slothful/1

* *Alexandre has the free skill package for humans, from p. 24 of the [Corporeal Player's Guide](#). He has also bought two characteristic points, giving him Strength and Agility 3 despite having only 1 Corporeal Force.*

† *Create Vessel is the ritual he uses to bind demonlings into dead bodies. See his background and Ummah's, below, for more details about this adventure McGuffin.*

UMMAH

GM Notes: Malakite Resonance Results

It is very probable that Merari will use her resonance upon the NPCs (and the PCs). This may be a good thing, if the Kyriotate winds up possessing someone -- its state of honor will be very different from that of a demon, demonling, or sorcerer.

Here are resonance results for the NPCs, by check digit.

Alexandre

1-2: Noble: Hung up his own clothes in the closet *or* did not abandon the kidnapping plan, if the GM is using that plot twist. Didn't do the dishes *or* kidnapped a child.

3-4: Noble: Mastered a difficult skill (the vessel ritual), did not flinch from putting the skill into practice, helped build something (the cage). **Ignoble:** Has not finished his book, has not deciphered a promising code in one of his reference works, has spent time

Calabite of Fate

Corporeal Forces - 2 Strength 4 Agility 4
Ethereal Forces - 3 Intelligence 7 Precision 5
Celestial Forces - 4 Will 10 Perception 6

Vessel: Human/4, Charisma/3 (Sex Appeal)

Skills: Dodge/3, Emote/3, Fighting/2, Lying/1, Savoir-Faire/2, Seduction/1

Songs: Charm (Celestial/4), Entropy* (Ethereal/1, Celestial/1), Light (Celestial/3)

Attunements: Calabite of Fate, Infernal Pact

** As an entropic Calabite herself, Ummah has a +1 to the check digit of any successful performance of the Songs of Entropy.*

Combat Tactics: Ummah, like her pet sorcerer, is not the sort to seek out brawls. She's capable, but would rather spread confusion with her Songs of Entropy, her entropic resonance, and the demonlings. If pressed corporeally, she will shift to celestial form, where she is *much* more potent! (Her Fighting skill is suddenly based on Will, for instance, and her Dodge on Perception. *And* she still has her resonance.) She'd be willing to stall angels to let Alexandre (her meal ticket) get away, but would rather descend to her Heart than risk losing more than 1 Force, rather Trauma than soul-death, and rather let her human dupe die than experience Trauma herself. And, of course, the demonlings are totally expendable to her; let them deal with the PCs, help them mop up if they're winning, and flee with Alexandre otherwise.

DEMONLING HORDE

Corporeal Forces - 1 Strength 2 Agility 2
Ethereal Forces - 1 Intelligence 1 Precision 3
Celestial Forces - 1 Will 3 Perception 1

Vessel: Dead Body/1

Skills: Fighting/2, Move Silently/1, Running/1

Since the bodies decay and require maintenance, the number of demonlings in the horde is restricted by how many Alexandre and Ummah can keep intact; they're at about maximum now, but the PCs don't need to know that. They can discover that the bodies are fragile on their own, but the sheer numbers of the little horrors (as many as the GM feels like running in combat) makes them a threat. The dead-body vessels that the demonlings have *are* vessels, and as such, may be possessed by a Kyriotate . . .

Combat Tactics: These are not sophisticated fighters, looking for openings or tricky ways to get behind enemies. They just attack, or just run, very simply. To avoid bogging down the action, the GM may wish to roll once and require Dodge once per "sub-horde" of demonlings (making any damage a small multiple of the check digit), or use only eight to ten as the total horde. Operate on mob mentality: if more than one or two attack, they all attack. If more than

photographing his servant instead of working. (If using the kidnapping thread, insert those results as appropriate instead of the last entries.)

5: Most Noble: Alexandre did not give up when he was bullied and abandoned, but instead picked himself up and kept going. **Most Ignoble:** He sold his soul to Hell. (Alexandre does not consider this ignoble; he found the ritual and made it work, did he not?)

6: Alexandre aspires to be a secret ruler of the world, an immortal mover and shaker behind the scenes, able to control the lives and happiness of others -- and a knowledgeable and potent mastermind. And indeed, he has that dark potential! If he turned his abilities to selfless ends, he could be a leader of others, bending his remarkable will toward the greater good with impassioned and inspired speeches. He is, obviously, closer to the darker end of this.

Ummah

1-2: Noble: Has *not* slaughtered a half-dozen of the annoying little creatures, despite provocation. **Ignoble:** Has neglected several opportunities in her work to pursue recreational activities.

3-4: Noble: Obtained the experimental ritual and helped her "junior partner" complete it, thought of using small animals for vessels instead of robbing graveyards, has not slaughtered the creatures despite provocation. **Ignoble:** Has neglected opportunities to pursue recreation instead, wasn't able to figure out how to

one or two flee or are killed, they all flee.

***GURPS In Nomine* Appendix**

Nothing says that this adventure could not be a sampler -- or introduction -- for ***GURPS In Nomine***, or simply dropped into any other supernatural-tinged campaign with minor changes. Here are the ***GURPS*** character sheets for the pre-generated player characters and NPCs.

GURPS In Nomine

GURPS In Nomine uses ***GURPS Third Edition*** rules; all references to ***GURPS*** in this section mean the Third edition, not the Fourth. Converted characters have been "normalized" as if they had been created in ***GURPS***. The only exception is in levels of Discord; in a normal conversion, an adapted Frequency of Submission table (pp. CI10-11) would be used. For simplicity, Discord has been taken "straight," with the default ***GURPS Basic Set*** or ***GURPS Compendium I*** mechanics. Note that Songs have had the -5 applied for use outside the celestial realm. If these characters go to Hell or Heaven, they will have +5 to all Songs. The default Tech Level for ***GURPS In Nomine*** is TL7.

Extra Hit Points and Reduced Hit Points

Many converted ***GURPS*** characters have Extra Hit Points for physical, mental, and celestial combat. The physical advantage is written as Extra Hit Points for the vessel in question. Extra Hit Points (Mind) are bought with the -50% Limitation, "Only for mental combat," and Extra Hit Points (Soul) are bought with the -20% Limitation, "Only for celestial combat." Reduced Hit Points for Mind Hits and Soul Hits have the same Limitations. See ***GURPS In Nomine***, pp. 27-28, for more information.

Power Investiture and Essence Control

The ***GURPS In Nomine*** advantages Power Investiture (p. IN27), and Essence Control (p. IN31) are both included in the Basic Celestial Template (pp. IN9-10). Celestials are assumed to have the default 9 levels of Essence Control, and have allocated their initial Power Investiture levels to Power Investiture (Corporeal) 3, Power Investiture (Ethereal) 3, and Power Investiture (Celestial) 3. Any totals listed in the descriptions include these levels plus any additional purchased; lower levels than 3 will be treated as disadvantages.

Page References

Rules and statistics in this article are specifically for the ***GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition***. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the ***GURPS Basic Set*** -- e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the ***GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition***. Page references that begin with CI indicate ***GURPS Compendium I***, M is for ***GURPS Magic***, and IN refers to ***GURPS In Nomine***. For a full list of abbreviations, see p. CI181 or the [updated web list](#).

make the ritual work *better*, had to grovel and beg to get the utilities turned on.

5: *Most Noble*: Ummah has served her master with devotion and zeal, nearly selfless in her belief of the rightness of his cause. ***Most Ignoble*:** She is plotting to overthrow her immediate superior . . . eventually . . . and take her place. (Ummah considers both of these noble.)

6: Ummah aspires to be a secret master of the fates of others. Her true depths are not so grand -- she is more a secret middle-manager of the fates of others -- and her possible heights would have her a sympathetic counselor, healer of the emotional wounds of others.

Screaming Demonlings

1-2: *Noble*: Won a fight!
***Ignoble*:** Lost a fight!

3-4: *Noble*: Won a fight, caught a small furry thing, blamed something on someone else and got away with it.
***Ignoble*:** Lost a fight, tore a small furry thing so much it wasn't very useful for making vessels, got caught doing something.

5: *Most Noble*: Got to Earth!
***Most Ignoble*:** Got summoned and enslaved.

6: The demonlings aspire to gain power (over others, via more Forces, etc.) so that they can hurt what they don't like and escape bigger things. They are paragons of stupid selfishness, and their darkest depths would make them

Player Characters in *GURPS*

Though starting characters by the rules on p. IN16 -- the Basic Celestial Template, Choir, and Choir Attunement are "free," and the remainder is built on 100 points plus disadvantage and quirks -- total character points have been listed for each of the pre-generated PCs.

powerful as well -- but as demonlings, they do hold the unlikely potential to seek redemption and become angels. The *very* unlikely potential.

Most of the characters have few, if any, Disadvantages, and some undefined Quirks. If the GM permits, players may customize their characters appropriately.

Jonathan, Seraph of Destiny

631 points

ST 12 [-15]; **DX** 12 [-15]; **IQ** 16 [20]; **HT** 14 [0].

Speed 6.5; Move 6.

Dodge 6.

Advantages: Alertness +4 [20]; Basic Celestial Template [480]; Choir (Seraph) [26]; Choir Attunement (Seraph of Destiny) [25]; Power Investiture (Celestial) 4 [10]; Vessel (Human, Extra Hit Points +5, Zeroed) [60].

Disadvantages: Power Investiture (Corporeal) 2 [-10]; Servitor of Destiny [-7].

Quirks: Confident in his Archangel's estimation of him; Takes slang and euphemisms literally; 3 to be chosen by the player [-5].

Skills: Acting-14* [1/2]; Area Knowledge (Yves' Library)-14 [1/2]; Artist-13 [1/2]; Computer Operation/TL7-15 [1/2]; Detect Lies-14 [1]; History-13 [1/2]; Leadership-14 [1/2]; Literature-17 [6]; Mathematics-13 [1/2]; Musical Instrument (Violin)-13 [1/2]; Research-14 [1/2]; Singing-15 [2]; Typing-11 [1/2]; Writing-13 [1/2].

Songs: Healing (Corporeal)-17 [12]; Healing (Ethereal)-14 [2]; Healing (Celestial)-13 [1]; Shields (Corporeal)-17 [12].

Languages: Angelic (native)-16 [0]; English (native)-16 [0]; Spanish-14 [1/2].

* Jonathan cannot use his Acting skill to lie. However, he can use it to remain poker-faced, or to emphasize *true* body-language.

Merari, Malakite of Fire

650 points

ST 14 [0]; **DX** 16 [20]; **IQ** 12 [-15]; **HT** 15 [10].

Speed 7.75; Move 9.

Dodge 9.

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5]; Basic Celestial Template [480]; Choir (Malakite) [35]; Choir Attunement (Malakite of Fire) [35]; Combat Reflexes [15]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Power Investiture (Corporeal) 4 [10]; Strong Will +1 [4]; Vessel (Human, Extra Hit Points +1, Zeroed) [40].

Disadvantages: Power Investiture (Ethereal) -1 [-10]; Servitor of Fire [-12].

Quirks: Enjoys Mayhem; Defers to Seraphim and Servitors of Destiny; 3 to be chosen by the player [-5].

Skills: Acrobatics-14 [1]; Brawling-17 [2]; Climbing-15 [1]; Escape-14 [1]; Fast-Talk-12 [2]; Running-13 [1].

Songs: Healing (Corporeal)-10 [2]; Numinous Corpus (Claws)-10 [2]; Shields (Corporeal)-12 [8]; Shields (Celestial)-12 [8].

Languages: Angelic (native)-12 [0]; English (native)-12 [0].

Hasadiah, Kyriotate of Creation, in service to Blandine

780 points

ST 13 [-10]; **DX** 13 [-10]; **IQ** 13 [-10]; **HT** 16 [20].

Speed 7.25; Move 7.

Dodge 8.

Advantages: Alertness +2 [10]; Basic Celestial Template [480]; Choir (Kyriotate) [175]; Choir Attunement (Kyriotate of Creation) [25]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Power Investiture (Celestial) 4 [10]; Servitor of Eli, In Service To Dreams [29]; Strong Will +6 [24].

Disadvantages: Power Investiture (Ethereal) -1 [-10].

Quirks: Refers to itself as plural; Doesn't like the Marches; 3 to be chosen by the player [-5].

Skills: Acting-14 [4]; Brawling-12 [1/2]; Escape-12 [2]; Fast-Talk-12 [1]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-14 [1/2]; Lockpicking/TL7-14 [4]; Savoir-Faire-13 [1]; Stealth-15 [8].

Songs: Entropy (Celestial)-12 [4]; Healing (Corporeal)-14 [12].

Languages: Angelic (native)-13 [0]; English (native)-13 [0].

In **GURPS In Nomine**, Hasa relies far more on IQ to be a "social spy" concept than it does in **In Nomine**, and designing "them" as a **GURPS** character reflects this.

Kris Murphy, Soldier of Dreams

100 points

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 13 [30]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 9 [-10].

Speed 5.5; Move 5.

Dodge 6.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Soldier of Dreams (Essence Control 6, Power Investiture (Corporeal) 1, Symphonic Awareness) [46]; Toughness +1 [10].

Disadvantages: Duty (Dangerous, quite often (12 or less)) [-10]; Struggling Wealth [-10].

Quirks: Trademark: Refers to "Murphy's Law" in various ways; *Likes* being possessed by a Kyriotate; 3 to be chosen by the player [-5].

Skills: Acting-10 [1/2]; Area Knowledge-12 [1]; Driving (Car)-12 [1]; First Aid/TL7-12 [1]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-15 [1]; Lucid Dreaming-15 [6]; Hobby Skill: War-games-11 [1]; Psychology-12 [4]; Swimming-12 [1/2]; Tactics-13 [6].

Songs: Dreams (Corporeal)-10 [2].

Languages: English (native)-13 [0].

* Kris' Hobby Skill might be useful enough to be full price -- as it is listed here -- or the GM could rule it a true *hobby*, with the effective points counting double, and say Kris has it at 12 instead.

The Game Master might also allow Kris' player to assign up to twenty more points in Disadvantages, which could purchase Ethereal Connection (p. IN19) and an Ethereal Song (such as Ethereal Shields), or raise Kris' IQ.

Non-Player Characters in *GURPS*

Like the pre-generated player characters, the NPCs have been "normalized," as if they were created in *GURPS In Nomine* to begin with -- and Alexandre and Ummah are both now starting-level characters.

Alexandre Darkmoon, Sorcerer

100 points

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

Speed 5.75; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5]; Sorcerer (Essence Control 6, Power Investiture (Sorcery), Symphonic Awareness) [46]; Strong Will +4 [16]; Toughness +1 [10].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Nearsighted) [-10]; Laziness [-10]; Lecherousness [-15].

Quirks: Budding megalomaniac; Dislikes cute, furry animals [-5]; Hates his real name; Writing a Grand Occult Book [-4].

Skills: Area Knowledge-12 [1/2]; Computer Operation/TL7-12 [1/2]; Driving (Car)-11 [1/2]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-14 [1/2]; Knife-12 [1/2]; Occultism-13 [2]; Professional Skill (Taxidermy)-11 [1]; Research-11 [1/2]; Swimming-12 [1/2].

Spells: Create Vessel-11 [1]; Loyalty-11 [1]; Planar Summons (Ethereal Realm)-12 [2]; Summon Demonling-12 [2].

Languages: English (native)-13 [0].

Ummah, Calabite of Fate

613 points

ST 12 [-15]; **DX** 12 [-15]; **IQ** 16 [20]; **HT** 14 [0].

Speed 6.5; Move 6.

Dodge 7.

Advantages: Band (Calabite) [28]; Band Attunement (Calabite of Fate) [5]; Basic Celestial Template [480]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Power Investiture (Celestial) 4 [10]; Servitor Attunement (Infernal Pact) [10]; Strong Will +5 [20]; Vessel (Human, Very Beautiful, Zeroed) [60].

Disadvantages: Power Investiture (Corporeal) -1 [-10]; Reduced Alertness -3 [-15].

Quirks: Devoted to Fate's service; Enjoys tormenting lesser beings (e.g., demonlings); Indulges in corporeal pleasures; Lousy housekeeper; Plots to overthrow her immediate superior, Hatiphas, Balseraph Demon of Sorcery, and take her Word [-5].

Skills: Acting-17 [4]; Brawling-12 [1]; Research-15 [1]; Savoir-Faire-17 [2]; Scrounging-16 [1]; Sex Appeal-15 [4].

Songs: Charm (Celestial)-16 [8]; Entropy (Ethereal)-13 [1]; Entropy (Celestial)-13 [1]; Light (Celestial)-15 [4].

Languages: English (native)-16 [0]; Helltongue (native)-16 [0].

Infernal Pact is the Servitor Attunement of Fate (and Sorcery) which grants the advantage of Power Investiture (Sorcery) -- and incidentally damns the human who accepts it. *Infernal Pact* is a new power, costing 10 points.

Despite not being a starting character in ***In Nomine***, Ummah can be made easily enough as a starting character in ***GURPS In Nomine***.

Demonling Horde

140 points

ST 6 [-70]; **DX** 5 [-80]; **IQ** 4 [-90]; **HT** 6 [-70].

Speed 2.75; Move 3.

Dodge 3.

Advantages: Basic Celestial Template [480]; Strong Will +2 [8]; Vessel (Dead Body, Ugly, Zeroed) [25].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10]; Bestial [-10]; Bully [-10], Dead Broke [-25]; Duty (Involuntary, Quite Often (12-)) [-20]; Essence Control 3 [-6]; Power Investiture (Corporeal) -2 [-20]; Power Investiture (Ethereal) -2 [-20]; Power Investiture (Celestial) -2 [-20]; Reduced Alertness -3 [-15].

Quirks: Cowardly individually, bold in packs; Glad to be out of Hell [-2].

Skills: Brawling-8 [8]; Running-6 [4]; Stealth-5 [2].

Languages: English (native)-4 [0]; Helltongue (native)-4 [0].

Individually, they are revolting, but not that terrifying. Add demonlings until they are suitably threatening.

Getting the Job Done

for *GURPS*

The alley, down which they had chosen to make their escape, was a dead end. A 30-foot brick wall matched those to either side. They turned to see to see that the flesh-eating zombies had spotted them and were already coming down the alley. The undead didn't move fast, but they were relentless and much more durable than the movies had implied. Murdock pulled out his picks and started working on the locked door. If they could get through in time, they might make it to safety and better weapons.

"How long?" asked Johnson as he locked his last magazine.

Sadly for Murdock, the Basic Rules for **GURPS** is 1 minute minus 5 seconds per point by which the roll was successful. If the attempt was a failure, then after the first minute, the clock starts again, even though Murdock's player knew after 1 second that he would fail. Meanwhile Murdock's player sits there during the combat with the zombies and each round says "I'm picking the lock."

Long actions in RPGs are boring and not terribly realistic. In the Lockpicking example, the roll is made at the beginning of the action, so the player probably knows if he was successful and how long it will take or if he was unsuccessful and will just be out of play for the minute, then roll again for another long wait. If the GM rolls (to keep the mystery of the length of time) then the player has no clue that he's hopelessly botched it until the minute has elapsed. Additionally, picking a lock will never take more than a minute per attempt. This steals from the drama and excitement of the scene. If combat were handled this way, no one would play.

"Roll versus your weapon skill."

"I made it by 3."

"Good roll; you will kill him in 45 seconds. Let's see how he does. The bad guy only made it by 1, so he'll kill you in 55 seconds, if you decide to do anything besides combat."

Basic Theory

Instead of a fixed amount of time for a task, a variable amount of time determined by the luck of the player and skills of the hero could be used. Because of the nature of **GURPS** in keeping all skills along the same rules, tasks are easily integrated into combat. Each round there is an attack, damage, and possibly regeneration. Each task has a number of Task Points which correlate to hit points; when the points are gone, the task ends.

Attack the Task

For any given task a PC has a skill; it might be a default, but there is a number that may be rolled against. The character may also have advantages and equipment to make a job easier or some disadvantages to slow him down. Some equipment will only apply to skill, some only to progress. A power drill will make the job go faster, but a laser guide on the saw only adds to skill. Each round the player makes a roll against his skill with the appropriate modifiers. On a success, progress is made. On a critical success the progress roll is maximum. On a failure, no progress is made. On a critical failure a setback has occurred (see below). Some skills, such as digging a hole or bailing out a boat, do not require a skill roll. Use a margin of 0 for these cases.

Make Progress

Each task has an attribute associated with it. This may be the primary attribute for the skill or a different one. Lockpicking is a mental skill and IQ would be the base for the skill roll. Actually picking the lock is a DX event so DX would be the affecting attribute. Perception or other derived values may also be used. The margin of success is added

to the affecting attribute and any other pertinent bonuses, and the thrust damage value from the basic damage table is determined. This is the amount of progress made. Note that a failure does not allow progress at a lesser value. If the total progress made exceeds the Task Points of the project, the long action is a success. If not, the PC continues next round.

Regeneration

Some tasks are not straightforward. Bailing water out of a leaky canoe is an example. No matter how fast the bailing is happening, water still comes in until the canoe capsizes. In this case the Task Points might recover 1 to 1d per round until the canoe capsizes or the leak is repaired, at which point the bailing would continue until everyone relaxed.

Setbacks

When a task goes horribly wrong setbacks occur. The following list is not comprehensive.

- Tools broken or dropped out of reach (into water or off ledge).
- Task becomes impossible (jammed or hopelessly destroyed).
- Progress lost. Work must be restarted from 0 or some earlier breakpoint.
- Something related goes awry adding to the total TP required.
- End results are not exact (research reveals incorrect answer).
- Related distraction occurs (alarms are activated, or high pressure fluid leak).

Task Points

In this system a task needs Task Points . . . but how many? Like hit points, PCs should not know how many they need for any specific task, but may know the neighborhood. The number of TP for a project can be calculated from the amount of time the GM would like the task to take or thinks is reasonable and multiplying it by the average progress for the character. For instance, a skill 12, attribute 12 PC will generate 3 points of progress each round. If the GM wants it to take about a minute, that's 180 TP. If a different PC (skill 10 attribute 10) tried the same task, it would take just over two minutes on average.

Average Progress per Round

Affecting Attribute									
	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24
Skill									
8	0.5	0.7	0.9	1.1	1.4	1.6	1.8	2.0	2.3
10	1.1	1.4	1.9	2.3	2.8	3.2	3.6	4.1	4.5
12	1.9	2.4	3.1	3.7	4.4	5.0	5.6	6.3	7.0
14	2.7	3.5	4.3	5.0	5.8	6.6	7.4	8.2	9.0
16	3.6	4.4	5.3	6.1	7.0	7.8	8.7	9.5	10.4
18	4.4	5.3	6.1	7.0	7.8	9.7	9.5	10.4	11.2
20	5.3	6.1	7.0	7.8	8.7	9.5	10.4	11.2	12.0
22	6.1	6.9	7.8	8.7	9.5	10.3	11.1	11.9	12.8
24	6.5	7.4	8.2	9.0	9.8	10.5	11.3	12.2	13.0

A Look at Longer Long Actions

Not all long actions can or will be resolved within a stretch of combat. Gathering information, designing and building a vehicle, or performing surgery are examples. These tasks might be rolled for hourly or daily with the TP adjusted accordingly. A character in a strange city might need to find a controlled or restricted item. Using Streetwise hourly, using perception at the affecting attribute might require 30 TP. A carpenter and his crew might need 300 TP to raise a

house, and roll daily.

Teamwork

Some tasks can be accomplished faster by having more people working on it. Some are better with only one or two people. Lockpicking is slower with two or more. Surgery would peak at around three surgeons. Searching the countryside for a fugitive or missing person is better with many. The benefits of teamwork are that progress accrues faster and critical failures are rerolled, and counted as normal failures if the reroll is successful, somebody prevented the error.

If a task uses more than five people, one must be a leader. If the leader fails his Leadership roll, all other workers count half their normal progress (rounded up). The leader may, but does not have to, contribute to the progress. A leader may supervise up to his Leadership skill level of persons, with a -1 to his skill for each person over that. A manager with a 14 skill could supervise 18 people but would roll against 10, rather than 14. Reaction modifiers affect the roll, not the number of people supervised.

Shiftwork

Some tasks can be picked up by new workers as others tire, for instance building a wall around a town. If fewer than 1/3 of the people are replaced during any hour there is no change in the method, If more than 1/3 are replaced, then the leaders of each group must confer for 30 minutes or lose 1 hour of progress as workers try to figure out exactly where in the task they are. If there is no relieving shift, but the same workers will return after a rest (or the next day) no conference is needed.

Multi-Tasking

Some work can be done concurrently. A character could combine efforts to find restricted weapons, controlled drugs, illegal gambling, and a house of ill-repute using streetwise. If the goals and skills are appropriate a portion of points share. In the above example, the character would need 10 points for each of the 4 things, but after accruing 10 (enough for 1 goal) ¼ of those points would apply toward the second goal. When that was completed, ½ of the points for the third goal would be applied, and ¾ towards the fourth goal after the third was accomplished. The GM, not the player, should determine which goal is found first, second, etc.

Sample Task Points

These are included as a reference and should be adjusted to the GMs wants and specific circumstances and tasks.

Task	Skill	TP	Affecting Attribute	Roll Increment
Training an Animal	Animal Handling	100/Animal's IQ	IQ	Hour
Repair Leather Armor	Armoury	50	IQ	Minute
Repair Metal Armor	Armoury	30	ST	Hour
Conceal position	Camouflage	10/hex	IQ	Minute
Gather Information	Carousing	10/clue	IQ	Hourly
	Streetwise	10/clue	Per	Hourly
	Research	20/find	IQ	Hourly
Disguise	Disguise	150	Vision	Minute
Escape (1st try)	Escape	200	DX	Second
Escape (later tries)	Escape	30	DX	Minute
Pick Lock	Lockpicking	180	DX	Second
Repair vehicle	Mechanic	200 (simple)	DX	Second
		200 (complex)	DX	Minute
		200 (body work)	DX	Hour

Evaluate weapon	Weapon skill	60	IQ	Second
Haggle	Merchant	100	Per	Second
Salvage	Scrounging	40	Per	Minute

* * *

Johnson: *I club the zombie with my gun. I hit and 2 points of damage.*
Murdock: *Still working that lock. Success by 2 and 4 progress.*
GM: *Murdock, you hear a click and feel the bolt slide open.*

Pyramid Review

Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: The Roleplaying Game

Published by [Atomic Sock Monkey](#)

Written & Illustrated by Chad Underkoffler

64-page 2.1 MEG PDF; \$6

One of the best games of 2004 was Chad Underkoffler's [Dead Inside: The Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption](#), the RPG in which each character has lost his soul and must redeem himself in the spirit world in order to get it back. While that game was thoroughly thoughtful and serious, his **Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: The Roleplaying Game** is anything but. The title should be enough of a clue for that, and if not, the fact that all of this game's illustrations are done by the author as monkey/ninja/pirate/robot stick figures should be.

This is a very cartoon world, so logic gets diced and thrown out with the banana skins. Thus we are in the territory of Steve Jackson Games' **Toon** and Z-Man Games' [Cartoon Action Hour: The 1980's Action Cartoon RPG](#), more the latter than the former, and definitely within the realms of a single setting rather than the many. In fact, the setting is that of the author's earlier card game, [Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot Deluxe](#), itself an *Origins*-Award-nominated entry for *Best Abstract Board Game*.

Players take the titular roles and, to quote from the board game, each is "*Bathed in atomic radiation, these champions fight to the death in order to claim the sweet, sweet Uranium for the people . . . and Victory!*" Not only that, but each type also battles for the Mojo that will only make them stronger, and while not everyone likes each other -- monkeys dislike robots, but like pirates; ninjas like robots, but dislike pirates, and vice versa. Everyone hates the "evil" mysterious aliens.

Using the author's PDQ -- or Prose Descriptive Quality -- system, characters in the game are described by a Type (see the game's title for the ones available), and several Qualities that are assigned a rank which provides a modifier during game play from -2 to +6, applied to a 2d6 roll. Each character possesses a gift determined by Type, and a player gives his character some kind of a goal for which Mojo will be gained for achieving. Thus a Ninja character might be described as Gift: Adept (Physical); have the Goal: be an Über Guitarist, and possess the Qualities of Average [0] Ninja; Good [+2] Deliver Fast Food; Good [+2] Play Guitar; Good [+2] Kung Fu; Good [+2] Oriental Philosophy; and the weakness Poor: [-2] Sense of Honor.

The simple mechanics involve nothing more than rolling 2d6 adding in an appropriate quality to beat a target number. To this can be added an upshift bonus for being a badass and describing a character's actions. On the other hand, a downshift or penalty can reduce the effect of a quality, whether from a weakness or the situation. Skill rolls become more difficult if a character is hurt in combat. Damage is not taken in terms of hit points or wounds, but damage or failure ranks that are directly levied from the character's qualities. This can be damage inflicted from physical and social conflicts as much as environmental. In general this damage is temporary and characters recover lost quality ranks at the end of a scene.

In their favor, character types possess a gift that gives them a simple upshift per gaming session. For example, Robots gain a mental upshift, while Monkeys have a social upshift. They can also gain an upshift per session if it relates to their goal. And then there is Mojo. This comes in multiple flavors, one for each type as well as universal. In general, Mojo can be spent to gain an extra die before a roll, reduce damage or failure ranks, or to inflict them; with the universal Mojo powers and another pie per character there is a lot to remember . . . perhaps *too* many. Of course, Mojo can be saved and spent to increase the rank of any quality, including a character's Type.

Mojo is gained for playing to your character type, good roleplaying, and for winning challenges. A loser in a challenge always has to give the winner some of his Mojo, or he *dies*! The danger for the loser is if he has no Mojo to give, in which case he suffers "breakdown," and reduces his highest quality by a rank. Within the game, challenges are handled like duels and a judge is appointed in case Breakdown occurs. Challenges can be anything from air guitar duels to chili cook offs to wrestling bouts to racing in order to impress that certain girl.

Advice for the GM covers everything from finding players and the types of game possible with ***Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: The Roleplaying Game*** to setting up, writing adventures, and running the game. This advice is both clearly thought out and explained, surprisingly so for a game with no pretensions as to complexity and depth.

One final source of Mojo is Uranium, which converts into a single point of universal Mojo. It can also be used to heal damage and failure rolls and to buy things with.

Buying things in ***Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: The Roleplaying Game*** gets players the good things they want -- toys. Some of those listed include the Advanced Alien Ray Gun (AARG), the Mojo Monocle, or the One True Floppy Hat; vehicles, from an economy car to a speedboat; and even an HQ for the characters to hang about in.

A few scenario seeds are listed in a side box, but the game comes with a ready-to-play adventure "Invasion of the Mojo Snatchers." Strange things are going on with the Golden Pagoda Ninjas. Anyone who has lost or won a challenge against them has disappeared shortly after. Of course, it is up to the player characters to investigate. This is actually a nicely detailed adventure, offering up an evening or two's worth of entertainment as the characters discover that the Ninjas are messing with things that Ninjas were not meant to know!

For a simple game, ***Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: The Roleplaying Game*** is not a slapdash affair. It is fast, it is furious, and it is fun, with the mechanics for conflict offering up a pleasingly direct method of inflicting and taking damage. It is very cartoon like and should be played as such, but the system offers greater room for character development in the long term than most games of its ilk. It does mean that ***Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: The Roleplaying Game*** has less of a pick-up-and-play quality than other games, but for long-term, less-than-serious gaming ***Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: The Roleplaying Game*** is a well-developed alternative.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Pick

[Perplex City](#)

Published by [Mind Candy](#)

Six Perplex City puzzle cards, full color; \$4.99

In the dimension next door, the Receda Cube, the most valued relic they have, has been taken. By whom, and for what reason, none can say. What they do know is that it has been taken to Earth, and that's where we come in. The people of **Perplex City** are offering a substantial reward for the Cube's return, and everyone here is invited to play (at five bucks a pop, natch). They cannot travel here, but they can fling noodle-scratchers over our dimensional wall, and the truth is hidden inside the puzzle cards created by their prestigious Academy.

The object of the game is, well . . . that depends. The whole game is incremental. At its simplest, the idea is to solve the poser on a card. If you want to become 200,000 very real dollars richer (apparently they can do bank transfers across the dimensional gulf), you need to suck as much information as you can out of as many sources as you can, including the cards, some scattered websites, and even real people (or their cell phones), to unlock where on Earth the Cube has been hidden.

Each packet contains six Perplex City puzzle cards, all coded into various sets of four, such as the red hex set, the green hex set, the yellow circle set, and so on. On each card is a challenge, set forth by scribes of the Perplex City Academy. Solve a puzzle, and it's worth points at the website; solve all four puzzles from that particular set and there's a bonus in it. There's a panel reminiscent of the "scratch and wins" one gets at fast food joints or on lottery tickets that, when removed, lets you enter your unique code and the correct(?) answer into the website's database. Your score and points are tracked on the site's leaderboard.

Like anything collectible these days, some cards are common and others less so. The harder puzzles are limited to the "rare" extremity. A puzzle may be a simple maze, a not-so-simple maze, a logic problem, a math quandary, a chemistry quiz, or any of several other mind-benders and brain teasers. Stylized drawings on playing cards ask you to identify the pictured "kings and queens of rock." Another asks you to figure out children's ages based on a number, an unknown apartment designation, and one kid's eye color. Still another just requires that you label different forms of argument from a brief snippet of conversation.

The backs of the cards don't waste a lot of space either, some having pieces of a map of Perplex City (others have instructions on what to do with all your cards). The activities they offer aren't always limited to a single card, either. They promise appearances at conventions and some cards even give hints if you text-message Von the puzzle scribe. Along the way, the hope is that someone is going to piece together the mystery of who took the Receda Cube and why, and when they do there's a few thousand bucks in it for them.

Every card is a virtual explosion of color and creative graphic design. Some effects are photorealistic, others computer-generated, and some just hand-drawings. A lot of the work done by hand looks to be going for outright flair or practicality over pleasing aesthetics, but the player's big concern is whether it helps or hinders one to solve the puzzle. Since nothing can be easily overlooked or dismissed in this broad and spanning endeavor, it's unnerving to see that sometimes something is done in tiny script like an artist's name or the puzzle's inventor, but few entries are burdened thus.

With 256 cards in the series, there's plenty to see and do, and a lot to figure out. It's the sort of thing that's going to plague you on the way to work, and you may sit bolt upright during lunch to shout, "It's Wichita!" Even if you don't make a lunge for the brass ring gestalt, the game's bits and pieces are habit-forming. It's like a crossword puzzle . . . you get enough stuff right on the initial go-round to want to fill in those obstinate last few empty squares. It's a

solitaire game unlike any other you're likely to have played, but you can still get together with friends to try your collective wits against the scribes. Tying it to the collectible market is enough to send a shiver up the industry's spine, and a stroke of genius all by itself. **Perplex City**, an endlessly clever enterprise, presents the sort of tough mental thrashing most modern dungeon crawls can only dream of, and does so at a great price. Unless you're some sort of super-genius, you're going to get your five dollars worth of time from the six puzzles, and you can go in for a penny or a pound as your wallet allows.

Oh, and: Bone up on your Hebrew.

--*Andy Vetromile*

New Campaigns for a New Year

The New Year is almost upon us, and with it comes . . . well, heck, darned if I know. I may have some predictions coming up, but suffice it to say I pretty much scored an F on [last year's crystal ball gazings](#), so I'm feeling a bit gunshy.

Anyway, for something a bit different, I decided to write down the first three campaign ideas I could think of that incorporate the New Year in some interesting fashion. This might give the column a freer feeling, and will hopefully leave me with a few more minutes for working on another writing project that's coming due Real Soon Now.

Idea The First: They Say You Want a Resolution

What if, one New Year's, people realized that a New Year's resolution made at the stroke of midnight (their time) would automatically come true, within the confines of humanity? People who say, "I resolve to lose weight" or "I resolve to quit smoking" would find their urges to overeat or smoke evaporate. If someone were to say, "I resolve to train my body to peak physical condition," he'd find himself with the focus and energy to do so. If someone says, "I resolve to becoming dictator of the world," he would develop the power and ability (within human limitation) to have a go at it.

Of course, time zones being what they are, this realization would probably be stumbled across early on and reported, leaving those in later time zones with the edge.

As envisioned, this could play out as a universal origin story for a low-level Supers game; character creation would consist of asking, "What did you resolve to do?" (In fact, a clever GM with open-minded players might do well to ask them this question *before* telling them what the premise is.) The tricky part would be to sort out what, exactly, the limitations of the one-second wish are, and how much they can affect other people. ("I resolve to stand on the corpses of the entirety of humanity" probably wouldn't work, but "I resolve to kill as many people as I can" might give the person near-inhuman abilities to carry out that wish.) Regardless, none of the resolutions should be "show stoppers"; a resolution should give the person the edge, but it shouldn't do all the work. And if two resolutions conflict . . . well, that's what cool fight scenes in subway stations are for.

PC opportunities could revolve around trying to figure out what happened, stopping those whose resolutions make them a danger to society, and trying to channel the influx of (mildly) empowered people to a grander purpose.

Idea The Second: One Year Left . . . Pass the Bubbly

Okay; this one plays out roughly the same way as my internationally acclaimed *d20 Weekly* article "[The Least Year of Your Lives](#)," only without the cool power. (Article summary: A group of dungeon-crawlers learn that they've been bathed in a magical force that renders them invulnerable, but makes it so they only have exactly one year to live.) Basically, the world somehow learns on New Year's Day that *next* New Year's Day is going to be the last day for the Earth. The justification for this is up to the Department for Blowing Up the Earth, but whatever is chosen should basically leave the planet intact until the cataclysmic event; of course, if twitchy people destroy the planet ahead of time, that's hardly Cataclysm X's fault. In fact, the exact *reason* may not be known . . . only the certainty that all life (or, at least, all human life) will be gone come the next New Year's.

This campaign is envisioned as a sort of ***Twilight: 2000*** gritty post-apocalyptic setting mixed with some *Y - The Last Man*, only the planet is still working fine in the meantime. Who do the world's nations do? How do the various religions react? PC opportunities include trying to prevent or forestall the cataclysm, trying to keep world peace on a planet on the brink of premature collapse, and trying to get the "most toys" or power before the end.

The basic premise assumes a purely realistic campaign, but this could also serve as the basis for a more intense limited

series. Do those chanting *Call of Cthulhu* cultists have a point? How, exactly, does this turn of events fit in with the Boss' plan in an *In Nomine* campaign . . . and does this provide the impetus to consider the alternative's standing offer? Forget blowing a cardboard horn; Gabriel's got the real thing coming up.

Idea The Third: Can't Get Then From Here

A group of four to six friends met for a party one New Year's at the stroke of midnight . . . and vanished. They awoke to find themselves at 12:01 AM in 1977. At the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve of that year, they found themselves in 1984. And so on.

This is a group-based time-travel campaign, where the "mechanism" for getting from place to place is the New Year, and the PCs have a reason to stick together. It's sort of crosses the "time tourism" aspect of *Quantum Leap* with the group-leaping notions of *Sliders*. Of course, the notion of "time travel" is stretched somewhat here, since the bulk of the campaign will be spent *not* time traveling. (A year's a long time, really, although I suspect a year in the 840s would go faster than one in the past few centuries.) This would be a different type of wish-fulfillment campaign. If you were a big John F. Kennedy fan and awoke to find yourself on the morning of 1963, how would you go about trying to stop the JFK assassination? Is it even possible?

In a campaign that runs long enough, this could pose real moral questions for the PCs . . . especially if any meddlings don't go as planned. ("Yeah, some folks stopped the Kennedy assassination in '63, but some more loons went ahead and did it anyway in '67, in response to his pulling out of Vietnam . . .")

Alternatively, this could be an interesting spy campaign, hovering somewhere between the gritty and fantastic. Imagine that the PCs travel to 1955 and got recruited by a government; their knowledge of the future might be a significant edge (especially if they can figure out clever ways to use it), but if they're just normal schmoes caught up in this game, they may find themselves more than matched by agents who've actually spent more than 20 minutes training.

Regardless of what Earth-ending cataclysms or strange abilities the New Year's brings you, I wish you all a happy and safe holiday, and best wishes for a new year . . provided your wishes don't involve standing on my looted corpse.

--Steven Marsh

They Are But Shadows: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

*"Over park, over pale,
Through flood, through fire,
I do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moone's sphere;
And I serve the fairy queen,
To dew her orbs upon the green."*

-- William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II:i:6-11

We're halfway around the sky from midsummer, just past Yule. But as we do every year [at this time](#), we look back to [Shakespeare and the magic](#) he worked in verse and meter. This year, we look back an extra six months, is all, enjoying a Midsummer Night's dream on Midwinter Day. Are there other connections, besides the calendrical counterpoints? Such questions must remain mysteries. After all, as Shakespeare's rival Ben Jonson has Puck declare in a 1628 ballad, "I answer nought, but ho, ho, ho!"

*"But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigur'd so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images,
And grows to something of great constancy,
But, howsoever, strange and admirable."*

-- William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V:i:25-29

Duke Theseus of Athens is preparing to marry Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, and in honor of the wedding, a group of "rude mechanicals" plans to perform the play *Pyramus and Thisbe* for the Duke. But not all is well in Athenian love. Although Hermia, daughter of Egeus, is promised to Demetrius, she loves (and is loved by) Lysander. To escape Athenian law (which requires her to marry Egeus' choice instead of her true love), Hermia plans to flee into the woods with Lysander. Demetrius' ex-girlfriend Helena tells Demetrius about the scheme, hoping to sabotage his courtship of Hermia. The two couples enter the woods, where likewise love is strained between Oberon, King of the Fairies, and his Queen Titania.

Oberon and Titania are arguing over a changeling boy from India who Oberon wants in his court rather than in Titania's. He orders his servant Puck to find a magic flower with the power to compel love at first sight, and uses it to anoint Titania's eyes as she sleeps, hoping to trick her into loving a wild beast. For good measure, he also orders Puck to restore Demetrius' love for Helena, but Puck mistakenly anoints Lysander instead, sending Lysander into a passion for Helena. He then gives the leader of the "rude mechanicals," Bottom, the head of an ass, which is (of course) the first thing Titania sees upon awakening. After many hijinks, Oberon sorts out the four lovers and, having now acquired the changeling boy, restores Titania and Bottom to their wonted states. Theseus returns to the wood the next morning, gives the two couples his sanction, and watches with good humor as Bottom and company make a hash of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. As the hour grows late, Theseus dispenses with the customary epilogue, leaving Puck to deliver it.

*"The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name."*

-- William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V:i:14-19

The first printed text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appears in the First Quarto in 1600, but almost all sources date it earlier than that. Possible topical references include the death of Shakespeare's rival Robert Greene in 1592 ("Learning, late deceased in beggary"), and the terrible wet summer of 1594, which the play seemingly blames on Titania and Oberon's quarrel. The general wedding theme of the play, and the tone of arch condescension, indicate that

Shakespeare may have written it for a grand wedding -- specific fetes in 1594, 1595, and 1596 have all been put forth as dates for the play's debut. Since it shows some internal signs of revision (a good bit of the dialogue is in thunky rhymed couplets, characteristic of Shakespeare's work before he was inspired by [Marlowe's](#) "mighty line"), it may have "debuted" at more than one wedding. In however many revisions it took, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of the only three plays with plots entirely original to Shakespeare (along with *Love's Labours Lost* and *The Tempest*). That said, Shakespeare took some supporting details from Plutarch's "Life of Theseus" and from Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," and *Pyramus and Thisbe* from his favorite Roman source, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The [fairies](#), of course, came from the woods.

*"Now it is the time of night
That the graves, all gaping wide,
Every one lets forth his sprite,
In the church-way paths to glide,
And we fairies, that do run
By the triple Hecate's team,
From the presence of the sun,
Following darkness like a dream."*

-- William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V:ii:10-17

More specifically, Oberon came from French romance. "Auberon" (a name cognate with the Wagnerian "[Alberich](#)") was the fairy knight in the 13th-century *Huon of Bordeaux*, which Shakespeare probably encountered in a (now lost) play, *Hewen of Burdocize*, performed in 1593. Shakespeare took "Titania" from his beloved Ovid, who uses it as a synonym or title for Diana, the virginal moon and wood goddess. (Since Diana's mother, Leto, was a Titan, "Titania" may also refer to her parentage.) The conflation with Diana, or at least some goddess, becomes still clearer, since the changeling boy's mother is described as one of Titania's "votaresses," a queen in India who died in childbirth. (Left unspoken is the hint that Titania may have caused the death -- virginal votaresses aren't supposed to have children, even changeling ones.) The other fairies are your basic nature- and flower-spirits, named for natural phenomena -- Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mustard-Seed, and [Moth](#). And then there's Puck. Whether he began as the Welsh *pwca* or the Norse *púki* remains appropriately contentious; he is a tricky, shapeshifting spirit often associated with dogs, horses, and Hell. In the 16th century, "the Pouke" was synonymous with the Devil, which may have been why his placatory pseudonym "Robin Goodfellow" began to come in around then. In the play, Puck describes himself, perhaps archly, as "that merry wanderer of the night," and indeed by Shakespeare's era, the great fear of fairies was distant enough that they could be played for laughs. During the daytime, at least.

*"Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace: four happy days bring in
Another moon; but O! methinks how slow
This old moon wanes . . ."*

-- William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I:i:1-4

Of course, the action of the play is mostly at night, either on Midsummer Eve (by the title) or [Walpurgis Night](#), May Eve (by the dialogue). Theseus seems to believe the lovers have only entered the woods to perform the "rites of May" (or at least that's what he says, gentleman-like, when Egeus is listening), which would imply that May Day is the next morning. Both nights are nights when spirits abound and the doors of the otherworld swing open. The fairies openly claim allegiance to "triple Hecate's team," and Oberon must sharply remind Puck that "we are spirits of another sort," when Puck becomes nervous with the approach of dawn. Indeed, the description of the time indicates that Hecate's power is in the ascendant indeed, as Theseus and Hippolyta are to be married "four days hence" at the new moon's first appearance. Thus, the play takes place in the dark of the moon, despite the constant allusions to full-moony "lunacy" that overtake the lovers, and despite Oberon's greeting to Titania, "ill-met by moonlight." The word "moon" appears constantly (almost 40 times) throughout the play. Theseus threatens, for example, to force Hermia to become a nun, "chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon," and Oberon describes how Cupid's arrow missed the moon (in an apparent allusion to Queen Elizabeth's virginal lunar persona Cynthia) and struck the magic flower instead. The rude mechanicals check an almanac to see if there will be a moon, and go so far as to cast one of their own as Moonshine in order that *Pyramus and Thisbe* can take place by moonlight. Is this more of Shakespeare's time-twisting, a "moonlit

revel" on a moonless night? Perhaps it helps answer the question of the missing three days in the play -- Theseus' wedding was "four happy days" away when the lovers enter the wood, but when Theseus arrives the next morning, it is his wedding day after all.

"I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was: man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was -- there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, -- and methought I had, -- but man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was."

-- William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, IV:i:192-197

The other fraught question of the play is -- who is the hero? (It's not Demetrius or Lysander, both of whom are interchangeable drips.) Is it Theseus, whose alchemical marriage to Hippolyta theoretically frames the play? Oberon, who actually wins something -- the Indian changeling boy, and Titania's return to his bed -- for his efforts? Or is the hero Bottom the weaver, who after all gains Titania's love for a night, despite (or perhaps because of) being transformed into a donkey. During his transformation, however, Bottom does not react with Dionysian madness, but with simple English good humor -- afterward, he knows he has had "a most rare vision," which his jumbled, almost synaesthetic speech compares to St. Paul's vision of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:9; "things which the eye of man hath not seen"). But he cannot recall it; it is not accessible to him. Bottom is, however, the only human who has seen the fairies, even on this Midsummer Night -- he has traveled up into a moonlit world and returned. Bottom's transformation also seems to mirror the metamorphosis of Lucius into a donkey in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, a 2nd-century picaresque novel often read by occultists as an initiatory text. Lucius is restored by appeal to Isis; Bottom, rather, dallies with Isis-Titania while an ass, and is restored by Oberon. Lucius becomes an initiate of Isis; Bottom goes placidly back to weaving. If Shakespeare is using *The Golden Ass* as a model, he seems to be rejecting the parallel, or inverting it somehow.

*"Are you sure
That we are awake? It seems to me
That yet we sleep, we dream."*

-- William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, IV:i:181-183

He uses similar inversion with the inclusion of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, which deals with lovers who flee to the wilds for a rendezvous but kill themselves in the confusion brought on by a lion attack. In the rude mechanicals' version, the "lion" is half-lion, half-man, and his part "nothing but roaring," though Bottom suggests it should "roar as . . . any nightingale." (Is this a hint of [manticore](#)?) This "play within a play" has more than a whiff of [Romeo and Juliet](#) about it, but it draws out the venom from the four lovers' story. They enter the woods, full of dangerous spirits, but suffer nothing more than embarrassment and disenchantment. *Pyramus and Thisbe* thus becomes the tragedy nestled snugly within the comedy, the "dark twin" of the play we're watching. Oh yes, [twins](#) again. Demetrius and Lysander are often played as twins on stage, and Helena and Hermia are clearly interchangeable as well. But it goes deeper. Both Oberon and Titania are mythically twins (Alberich is twin to Merovich, Diana is twin to Apollo), and their contest reflects in the twinned lovers' disharmony. Shakespeare is using his twin symbolism as he often does, to indicate (or open?) a gateway between worlds, made clearer by his trickery with the moon and with the date of the play. Speaking of dyads, Theseus is often portrayed as having two fathers, Aegeus and Poseidon -- whose Roman counterpart, Neptune, is mentioned repeatedly in the play. Alberich's twin is "sea-born" Merovich, implying that Theseus is also twins with Oberon in some fashion. And indeed, Theseus' semi-divine parentage would logically imply that Theseus (like Heracles and Pollux) has a "mortal" twin, as well. Robert Graves speculates that Theseus' "missing" twin is his best friend, the Centaur-fighting [Peirithous](#), who remains trapped in the underworld, which is to say Hecate's realm, which is to say Faërie. Is Oberon Peirithous returned?

Or is Oberon using Theseus' marriage-by-conquest to Hippolyta to play up those similarities and work his will on Titania thusly? Is Oberon working his own midsummer alchemical marriage of solar hero and lunar [Amazon](#), aided by Mercurial Puck, to produce an (androgynous?) "changeling boy" from India as his golden prize? Is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a dramaturgy within a dramaturgy, then? The changeling boy has been raised with girls in Titania's court; is he an alchemical androgyne? Or something even more powerful? [Dionysos](#), half-divine, associated with

lunacy, comes out of India, after all. And his mother "being mortal, of that boy did die." He might well be considered a changeling -- and, as we have it, he invented dramaturgy. A dramaturgy within a dramaturgy within a dramaturgy? Is it an ultimate containment, a powerful mask of defanged manticores and incoherent initiates? We cannot know, by Shakespeare's design. Everything in this play is hidden inside another layer, an endless Klein bottle of nesting Russian dolls. It has, as the bully weaver assures us, "no bottom." Not merely the play, but the players (and by extension the audience, who have been watching an audience watch a play) are "but shadows." As Puck assures us, all involved have "but slumbered here, while these visions did appear." And if something still doesn't seem right to you, if you still toss and turn in your dreams, Puck "will make amends ere long. Else the Puck a liar call: So, good night unto you all."

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



The Malus Masks

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by [Royce Easton Day](#)
Illustrations by [Sarah E. Bentley](#)

Background

Objects of twisted genius, the magical artifacts known as the Malus Masks were the creation of the Magistra Lillae Malus, a twisted artisan and mage who lived some 1,800 years in the past. Why she felt compelled to create and inflict these terrible creations on the world is not known for certain. It said the Magistra herself was once a woman of great grace and beauty with many suitors, who was scorned and defiled by the one person she truly loved, filling her with a terrible hate and vengeance. Others claim that the masks are actually tools teaching morals, though anyone who has had their curses inflicted upon them would be hard pressed to agree.

What is known for certain is that the Masks are unique items, not yet duplicated by any enchanters, and carry a few common characteristics. The individual Masks are made from a variety of materials, usually expensive, and are designed to fit an adult human's face. Though there is no obvious means to keep the Mask in place, once one puts it up to a face, he will find the Mask sticks to the skin as if were glued there (Hex, cast with a Power of 20). A sufficiently skilled surgeon *could* remove one of the Masks (at a -3 to any Surgery rolls), but at the cost of removing the wearer's skin as well, giving him Hideous Appearance. Smashing it is an equally bad idea. Not only is it likely to result in serious injury to the wearer, it won't do a thing to release the curse, leaving the broken bits of Mask still stuck to the wearer's skin. Unless otherwise noted, each Mask also has holes for the mouth, eyes, and nostrils, allowing the wearer to eat, breathe, and speak without difficulty.

There are a couple of small compensations for wearing a Mask. For one, despite completely covering the face, it isn't at all uncomfortable to wear, and the skin underneath will not be harmed, despite the pores being blocked. Most importantly, while wearing the Mask, the wearer has the advantage of Unaging (included in the point total for each Mask). There are tales of some victims of the Masks wandering for centuries looking for a cure for their affliction, only to return home triumphantly to find everyone they have known and loved long dead.

Each Mask's curse *can* be overcome by the wearer. The solution is unique for every Mask, and will never be easy, but a sufficiently determined person should be able to discover it, either through research or insight into the Mask's effects. Solving the mystery of the Mask's curse can be the springboard for an intense roleplaying arc for any player worth their salt.

The Mask of Sorrow

Appearance: The Mask of Sorrow appears to be made of fine white porcelain, a single black tear painted below the right eye.

History: The Mask of Sorrow was reputedly first worn by the wife of Lillae's first lover, who rejected Lillae in favor of the woman who would be his bride. Within a year the woman's husband was dead by an unfortunate accident, as was most of his family and her own. The wife committed suicide shortly after her first anniversary of marriage.



Game Effects: The wearer suffers from Unluckiness, Area Effect/2 (100%), Emanation (-20%). [-3 Pts.]

Breaking the Curse: The Mask of Sorrow's curse may only be broken if the wearer is able to save his greatest love from a seemingly certain death.

Facestealer

Appearance: Facestealer barely looks like a mask at all, being merely an oval-shaped piece of honey leather dyed the color of light skin. Only when applied to a victim does its true nature come out. It adheres closely to the face for a few moments, and then falls away. On the inner surface of the mask is a reversed image of the victim's face. The victim's features have quite literally been stolen, leaving a horrific blank space where his features once were, only broken by a small slit that is the victim's mouth. The next person who wears Facestealer will have the victims' features overlaying his own.

This is the only mask that may be removed voluntarily by the wearer.

History: It is said the Lillae used this mask to steal the face of her former beau's love, to sneak into his bedroom and murder him. As this contradicts many other accounts of what happened to both Lillae's ex-lover and his wife, the truth is probably considerably different.

Game Effects: When wearing Facestealer after stealing another features, the wearer effectively is under a permanent Illusion Disguise spell. Meanwhile the victim of the theft is effectively Mute, Blind, and has No Sense of Smell/Taste. [-65 pts.]

Breaking the Curse: The effect can be reversed by persuading the person who is now wearing the mask to *voluntarily* remove it, and then transferring the mask back onto the victim's face, restoring their features. Of course by this time the victim may be quite mad, having been denied sight, speech, and smell for who knows how long. Attempting to surgically remove it would likely destroy it, along with any chance of the victim's face being restored to him.

The Hermit's Mask

Appearance: The Hermit's Mask looks to be woven of fine reeds, interweaved with dried flowers and leaves.

History: Little is known for certain about this mask, though it is claimed that Lillae inflicted it upon a potential suitor who dared to try and take the place of her first love. It is said that he fled into the woods when the mask was placed upon him, and shunned all human

Hermit's Mask

contact. Supposedly he died from an infection that could have been easily cured, if there had been anyone nearby.

Game Effects: The Hermit's Mask inflicts the disadvantages of Loner, and Phobia (Crowds), both with a self-control number of 6. However, in what must have been a rare moment of compassion for Lillae, it also grants the wearer Animal Empathy [-20 pts.]



Breaking the Curse: The curse of the Hermit's Mask may only be broken by the wearer finding true friendship with another person, despite his revulsion of human contact.

The Maestro's Mask

Appearance: The Maestro's Mask is another porcelain creation, covering the right half of the victim's face. Though he will not be able to explain it, a person who looks at the wearer of the Mask will be faintly reviled by them, suspecting terrible disfigurement underneath its surface.

History: Another Mask designed to destroy her enemies, Lillae sent the Maestro's Mask to a famous composer, who thought to use her terrible legend as the basis for an opera he was writing. As this was at least 300 years after Lillae's story first appeared, either it was truly created by someone also inspired by her story, or Lillae was keeping herself alive by unknown means.

Game Effects: Despite nothing being truly the matter with their features, the wearer of the Maestro's Mask will appear to onlookers to be of Monstrous Appearance. [-5 pts.]

Breaking the Curse: Much like the Hermit's Mask, the Maestro's Mask may only be removed by someone who truly loves victim, despite his "surface appearance."

The Stranger's Mask

Appearance: The Stranger's Mask takes the form of a hood made of black silk, and embroidered with intricate spiral patterns.

History: Nothing is truly known about this Mask. Given its nature, anyone who wears it is unlikely to be remembered. Why Lillae created it, and who its first victim was, is unrecorded to history.

Game Effects: The wearer now has the Spirit template, with the Apparition trait (F134). [151 pts.]

Breaking the Curse: The victim must be noticed by someone long enough for the corporeal person to remove the Mask. Given the fact the victim cannot be seen, heard, or touched without spending Fatigue, this may prove somewhat difficult.

The Monster's Mask

Appearance: Before the Mask is donned, it appears to be an elaborate beast mask of the sort used in royal masquerades, specifically that of a wolf, made of a genuine wolf's pelt.

History: In a rare moment of fairness, it would appear that the first victim of this Mask actually deserved wearing it. It belonged to one of Lillae's personal guards, who had a reputation for bestial behavior and abuse of women. Once it was given to him, he was quickly hunted down as a werewolf and killed.

Game Effects: Once donned, the victim now must add the Werewolf template to his character sheet (p. 112 of *Fantasy*), though it lacks the Infectious Attack disadvantage. [23 pts.]

Breaking the Curse: Any of the standard methods of curing a victim of lycanthropy will work, except (obviously) for killing the person who originally bit the victim.

The Songbird's Mask

Appearance: Another half mask, this one covers the upper part of the wearer's face, and is made in the shape of a robin's head, with genuine robin feathers and a yellow ivory beak used in its construction.

History: In another act of revenge against entertainers, this Mask was first placed upon the head of a mocking bard that dared sing about Lillae's crimes after her arrest, but prior to her execution. It is unknown how Lillae could have constructed and placed it upon the victim while she was imprisoned, though accomplices are one obvious avenue. Another might be that there was another mage in the world who was equally skilled at mask making, and who might be at large still.

Game Effects: The wearer Cannot Speak, though he can verbalize in bird songs (the sounds however, will not be

translated by any sort of Speak With Animals spell, since they're just nonsense). [0 pts.]

Breaking the Curse: The curse may be broken if the wearer becomes sufficiently skilled in Performance that they can tell their sad tale of imprisonment without the use of words to an audience of at least a dozen people (effectively gaining a high level of Gesture . . . writing it down won't help).

The Mask of Silence

Appearance: The Mask of Silence is actually a half-mask for the lower face, made of brown dyed leather inset with brass that has been shaped like Celtic knots, centered over the victim's covered mouth.

Mask of Silence

History: It is said that the Mask of Silence was placed over the face a servant who spoke out to a local magistrate about Lillae's creations of these dark enchantments. Unable to speak, and illiterate, he was prevented from bearing witness concerning the Magistra's use of dark magic.



Game Effects: The wearer of this Mask is effectively Mute, but they also gain the Doesn't Eat/Drink Advantage. [5 pts.]

Breaking the Curse: The Mask of Silence's curse may only be broken if the wearer is able to bring a great injustice to the attention of someone capable of correcting it (not the simple injustice of having the Mask inflicted upon them).

The Prisoner's Mask

Appearance: The most fearsome-looking of Lillae's creations, the Prisoner's Mask is made of beaten wrought iron, and fastened together with numerous rivets and magical welds. Tiny bars block the eyeholes and mouth of the Mask, though there is enough room for the wearer to eat, if he is content with small bites. The Mask does not merely cover the head, but extends down across the shoulders, permitting some distribution of its fearsome weight.

History: It is unknown for whom the Prisoner's Mask was originally intended. Ironically, Lillae herself was the first one to wear it, in the cell where she was imprisoned for her crimes, and where she remained until her reported execution.

Game Effects: The primary curse of the Prisoner's Mask is simply its formidable weight. At 50 pounds, only the strongest of men can bear it unimpeded. Most folk of average strength will quickly become fatigued from merely sitting or standing up unless the Mask is given exterior support. There's no matching disadvantage, though with the Unaging advantage the mask is worth 15 pts.

Breaking the Curse: The only way to remove the Mask is for the wearer to serve out their sentence or be pardoned from whatever crime they committed before the Mask was put into place. If the wearer is innocent of any crime, theoretically the Mask will not seal to their face.

Theoretically.

Malus' Mask

Appearance: A simple black and white linen face mask, with a large pearl in the center of the forehead.

History: Little is known about this Mask, except that Lillae herself wore it, after she was rejected by her love. After her execution it was removed from her face and placed within the personal museum of her judge, where it has remained.

Game Effects: This final mask acts as a Soul Jar, centered on the pearl, which contains the spirit of Lillae herself, who did indeed survive her execution by cheating death with it. Any unfortunate who places the Mask on their face must immediately enter a series of Contests of Will with Lillae (Will 17) to prevent his own soul from being shunted aside and his body taken over by her vengeful spirit. The Contest occurs once a day. If the wearer wins, then he stops Lillae from gaining further control over him that day. If he loses, he will have a negative penalty equal to all the contests he has lost so far. If/when he finally rolls a critical failure, Lillae takes over the body completely. Until then, his personality will gradually become more and more like Lillae's, centering on her obsession with masks, and gaining vengeance on all that slight her. In addition to roleplaying effects, with each lost contest, the wearer gains one of the following disadvantages: Bad Temper, Callous, Jealousy, Obsession (mask making), until they finally make a critical failure and Lillae's personality takes over completely.

Breaking the Curse: The only means to break the curse is for the wearer to either get a Critical Success during the daily contest, or force Lillae to roll a Critical Failure.

Adventure Seeds

Taking It Off: As mentioned at the beginning of this article, just trying to get rid of Mask is worthy of a full campaign arc. A PC who begins a game wearing one of the Masks must pay its point cost, despite the fact that whatever benefits gained by the Mask will be far outweighed by the costs. One of the most important things for a GM to keep in mind is the reason *why* the Mask was inflicted on the character. Perhaps he put it on out of curiosity, not understanding its malefic nature. Perhaps it was inflicted upon him by an enemy, in which case it may be vitally important to find out where the enemy found it in the first place, to prevent the other Masks from destroying the lives of innocent victims.

Putting It On: Of course the alternative is that the heroes find one of the Masks, and make plans to inflict it on a

deserving opponent. Why they might want to do this is open to question. Certainly an item like the Stranger's Mask or the Hermit's Mask would be useful to neuter an otherwise powerful enemy, and the Mask of Silence would be quite effective at stopping any mage who depended on voice to cast spells. The other Masks, however, are far less benign, and any adventurers that attempts to use them against an enemy should ask themselves if it would just be kinder to kill them instead.

Haute Tor'ture: In a week's time, the King will be hosting a Royal Masquerade. The capitol's nobility have been preparing themselves for the grand event for a at least month, but a shortage of properly skilled mask makers is leaving many of the high nobles worried that they might be forced to wear *last year's* mask. Fortunately, a new mask maker has come to town -- a woman of remarkable skill, and even more remarkably cold demeanor.

However, an illiterate street urchin known to the heroes sends a friend with a verbal message that the woman is not to be trusted. Before they can speak with the boy directly, they find that the Mask of Silence has been inflicted upon him. Could the new mask maker be Lillae herself, or is there another hand behind it entirely? And can they discover what is really happening before half the nobility of nation puts on this woman's masks?